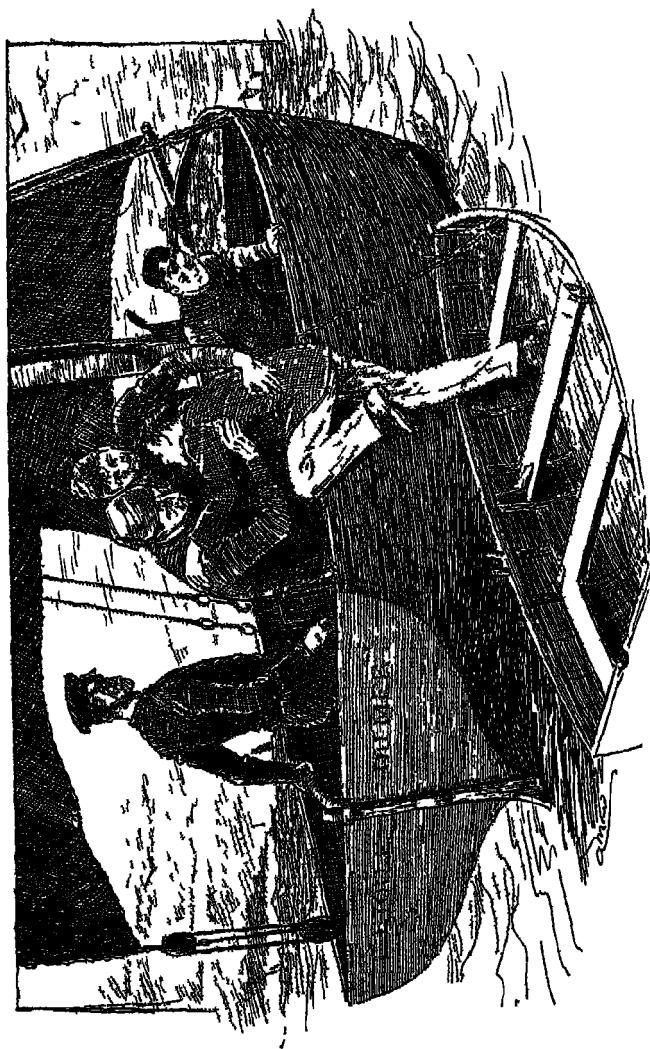


A CHASE ROUND THE WORLD



'STRONG RED HANDS' HELPED HIM ABOARD

From 'Updegraff'—see page 50

A Chase Round the World

THE FOLLOWING-UP OF A CHAIN OF MYSTERY

BY

ROBERT OVERTON

AUTHOR OF 'FRIEND OF FORTUNE,' 'AFTER SCHOOL,' 'LIGHTS OUT'
'THE KING'S PARDON,' 'FAR FROM HOME,' ETC

WITH ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS

BY A MONRO



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A CHASE ROUND THE WORLD

CHAPTER I

RAPID PROMOTION

COLIN CASSELDEN had won his naval cadetship 'hands down', his name topped the list this time.

Colin's father had regretted, and regretted still, his son's choice of a career; but, like a sensible man, he had not thwarted the youngster's fixed ambition to join the finest service the world has ever known. On the contrary, without removing him from the excellent private English school near Havre-de-Grâce, on the coast of France, to which he had preferred to send him rather than to a public school, he had permitted his later studies to be specially directed, in preparation for the second (final) examination, to undergo which the lad had in due time crossed over to London.

Pending the announcement of his success or failure, Colin had thought he would be allowed to remain at home. But 'No,' had said his level-headed pater; 'go

back to Doctor Pungthorn's and stick to your subjects harder than ever; you may have failed.' So back he had gone.

The list came out: he *had* failed.

'Will you give it up?' asked Mr. Casselden.

'No,' was Colin's answer.

He tried a second time; and failed a second time

'Will you or will you not give it up now, Colin?'

'No, father, I will not.'

He tried a third time, and now he had succeeded. Of course he had. A boy with the grit to face the discouragement of two defeats as he had faced it was bound to succeed in the long-run.

The good news reached Doctor Pungthorn's by the evening mail, and was soon known throughout the establishment.

In celebration of the event Colin gave a spread that night in the senior dormitory that, hastily as it had to be arranged for, eclipsed the glory of all past spreads in the school of which tradition still had anything to tell, and discounted the glory of all other spreads for a score of terms to come. The entertainment was not confined to the seniors in whose 'long room' it was given; a secret invitation was conveyed to every boy in the place, down to the smallest junior, to 'a night-shirt supper in the senior dormitory at ten o'clock.'

The proceedings were enthusiastic, but conducted with as little noise as possible.

At the proper stage Bedroom Monitor Bannister remarked that only one toast was to be proposed that evening—the health of Colin Casselden. Every boy in that room was aware of the fact that Colin had succeeded, after two unsuccessful goes at it, in passing the Service Examination for the Royal Navy. After such pork pies and sponge cakes as they had just put away at Colin's expense he felt that he must strike a sympathetic chord in the stomach of every one present—he meant soul, not stomach, for far be it from him to strike any school-fellow in the stomach, but the mistake was immaterial—when he said that the Royal Navy did not secure such a cadet every day. (Subdued cheers) He had referred to the fact that Colin had twice failed to pass. How was that? He did not hesitate to say that it was because he had a soul that soared above study, a soul that was seen to the greatest advantage in the field where manly sports were practised, in the gymnasium, and on the supper floor. And let it always be remembered that when he did pass he came out top.

There was another thing he would ask them to remember in uncorking the ginger-beer in which the toast was to be drunk, and that was that ginger-beer

was given to popping. As one pop of extra violence might betray them and lead to untimely interference, let every boy be careful how he opened his bottle. It was not the health of Mr. Midshipman Casselden he was about to ask everybody to join him in pledging; he felt that such a brick could not be kept on the lowest rung of the ladder for long. No; he took the liberty of looking a little ahead, and would propose the jolly good health of Lieutenant Casselden, R.N. If any fellow felt that he *must* give three cheers he must either get under a bed and give 'em there in a subdued voice, or smother them in the blankets.

Clyma major desired to back up the remarks that had just been made by old Bannister. Hold on while he had his say. Colin was going where glory awaited him—glory wouldn't have to wait long, for Colin was ready for it. He had eaten so much that he didn't feel up to a long speech. (Irrepressible cheers) Old Bannister had truly said that Casselden wasn't the sort of chap to be kept down by any Lords of the Admiralty; in fact, he (the speaker) was disposed to think that Casselden would soon be able to put 'om up to a thing or two. Looking a step farther ahead than Bannister had done, he would improve the form of the toast by suggesting: 'Commander Casselden and Glory!'

Clyma minor thirded the toast. He agreed with the sentiments that had been expressed. He and Captain Casselden would probably meet again, for it was his own rooted determination to enter the Navy—the meeting he looked forward to might take place amid the roar of battle, he would *not* shut up till he had finished—

Dexterously dodging seven well-aimed bolsters, the speaker was nicely warming to his subject when a backward pull on both his ankles by two unseen hands behind him laid him low.

Tom Grigsby only wanted to say that if there was any chap in the room who did not feel that in time to come Rear-Admiral Colin Casselden would do honour to the school, such a chap had that night been eating his grub under false pretences.

Bannister rose for the second time. There had been quite enough speechifying. He was not going to add to it, or allow anybody else to add to it. Their only candles were already burning low, and the crumbs had yet to be gathered up and all other signs of the feast to be cleared away. The health of Colin Casselden would now, please, be drunk by everybody, and then the Admiral of the Fleet would reply.

Corks were drawn, glasses filled with the impatient contents of the fizzing bottles, and emptied in honour

of the hero of the occasion—a sturdy, clean-cut ‘hero’ of some sixteen years, whose brown eyes were very



‘THE HEALTH OF COLIN CASSELDEN WOULD NOW, PLEASE, BE DRUNK
BY EVERYBODY.’

bright, and whose brown face was a little flushed, as he stood up to ‘return thanks.’

The square set of his shoulders, and the firm stand of

his strong legs, were noticeable even under the folds of his clinging white night-shirt. As Bannister had said, he *had* spent a good deal of his time in the gymnasium and the cricket and football field. It was easy to conceive that it was only a little too much devotion to athletics that had retarded his progress in some other things for a time—there was certainly no lack of intelligence in the bright face, and no fault could be found with the shape of the well-poised head. A merry smile played about his roguish lips as he spoke, but all the same there was something about those roguish lips that made it easy to realise how firmly he had twice said ‘No’ to his father’s question, ‘Will you give it up?’

He concluded what he had to say by an announcement that took a good many by surprise. His immediate return home in the event of that happening which had happened had been previously arranged for. He was going home to London to-morrow. He was to leave Havre by the mail steamer for Southampton the next night.

His school-days were over.

CHAPTER II

‘GOT AWAY!’

WE’RE all going to sea, but first we’ll go to a banker’s, a not unusual preliminary.

‘Good-morning,’ said Mr Percy Clivo Cassolden, as he walked through the outer office of the ‘London Industrial,’ Moorgate Street, into his private office behind.

‘Good-morning, sir,’ replied the clerks.

The London Industrial Bank had started as a building society, and succeeded. It had gradually expanded into a bank as well. Its principal customers and depositors remained of the same class, that of small capitalists: in most cases very small indeed. Its three acting directors, Mr. Cassolden (Colin’s father), Mr. Gregory Purdyke, and Mr. George Pardoe were shrewd men, and the concern they managed was a prosperous one.

It had now to face a severe shock—the fraudulent failure of a very much larger society conducted on similar lines, which was bound to have the effect of alarming its own shareholders and depositors.

It had prepared for the blow by the means that had already been adopted for the quick realisation of securities and the provision of a large amount in cash for the expected 'run' upon its coffers, though the faces of the directors were grave and even a little anxious as they forgathered in Mr Casselden's room a few minutes after his arrival on the morning we enter its doors

Letters, a private ledger, some other ledgers, papers, and books, were examined with the easy rapidity of accustomed eyes

'The rush won't last long,' said Mr. Pardoe, the youngest of the trio. 'We shall soon restore confidence It'll be at its worst to-morrow.'

'We can stand it We're ready for it,' said the managing director with a sigh of relief

'Quite, Casselden, quite,' said Mr Gregory Purdyke emphatically, stroking a silky, carefully-trimmed and very thick moustache 'I have to be at Huth's at eleven,' he added, with a glance at the massive gold watch at the end of his massive gold chain 'They ought to do that paper for us at a quarter less. You'll go round to the Bank of England yourself, I suppose, later on?'

'Yes,' replied Casselden, 'this afternoon'

Purdyke reached a glossy hat from its peg in the adjoining room, adjusted it carefully on his head,

donned over his black frock a fashionably-cut light summer overcoat—in the buttonhole of which he slipped a rare exotic bloom—drew on a pair of neatly-fitting gloves, and left the offices of the ‘London Industrial.’

Some three hours later Cassoldon and Pardoo compared notes. The paying cashiers had been a little busier than usual; the receiving cashiers not so busy. The later posts had added to the number of withdrawal notices from the country and suburbs. The overwhelming nature of the disaster that had overtaken the huge concern that had had to close its doors was being realised far and wide: the wind was rising for the morrow’s gale.

‘We shall be all the stronger for showing our strength by weathering the storm.’

‘That’s just what I’ve been thinking,’ agreed Pardoo cheerily. ‘It’ll be the old story—real good will come out of seeming evil. Come in!’—for a tap sounded at the door.

A bald-headed young clerk entered the room. He moved quietly and spoke softly, but did both quickly.

‘The cabman who drove Mr. Purdyke to the station is here, and says he has something to restore which he won’t leave over the counter. It appears that Mr. Purdyke left his pocket-book in the cab.’

‘What station?’ exclaimed Mr. Casselden, his junior at the same moment ejaculating—

‘What cab?’

‘I understood the man to say he had driven back from Waterloo, sir,’ answered the clerk, in more direct reply to the first question.

‘Waterloo!’

Again the two directors spoke together, and a quick glance of surprise passed between them, noted and afterwards commented upon by the observant clerk.

‘Send the man in here,’ said Mr. Casselden abruptly, the next moment.

The man entered—a weather-stained, rather hoarse-voiced London hansom cab-driver, a thoroughbred Cockney in manner, look, and brogue. His first words betrayed him.

‘I beg yer pardon, gennelmen, for introodlin’, but I fahnd this ’ere pocket-book in my keb after drivin’ Mr. Purdyke to Waterloo this mornin’. I should ha’ took it to Scotland Yard, only Mr. Purdyke’s a reg’lar fare o’ mine, he is, not to say nothink o’ me havin’ a bit in the show myself for the missis and the kids against a rainy day. And Mr. Purdyke—he’s that careless, he’s orfen left things be’ind ’im beforo nahw—he says to me the last time I give ’im back ’is broolly, “That’s right, Sims.” he says; “never mind abaht Scotland Yard. When you

know anything's mine bring it to the bank." So as I knowed this 'ere pocket-book was 'is—'ere's 'is name ahtside, and I spotted it 'most before he'd got away—I brought it rahnd as soon as I'd set dahn my next fare, as was to Clappam.'

Mr. Casselden took the pocket-book and laid it on the table.

'You drove Mr Purdyke to Waterloo Was he—do you know—going to meet some one there?'

'No, sir. He caught the 123 for Southampton Leastways, that's what I reckon'

'Why?'

Mr. Casselden had asked one question, Mr. Pardoe the other. Each thought he had spoken apparently carelessly. Neither had

'Becos when I see the book through the trap I got dahn and looked all over the shop for 'im withaht findin' 'im —and I see the 123 go aht'

'Thank you. Mr Purdyke will be much obliged to you As this is his private pocket-book, no doubt he'll prefer to see you himself'

'Oh, that's all right, sir, I ain't afraid to trust Mr. Purdyke. Nor the bank either, gennelmen,' said Mr. Sims the cabman, heartily but awkwardly, as he moved towards the door—'nor the bank either, though I know a thing or two I've 'ad my little bit in the 'Dustrial

since it started, and it'll last my time Good-day, sir
—good-day, sir'

The door swung-to behind him. A second glance—as quick and involuntary as the first—was exchanged between the two directors. Then each avoided the eyes of the other, as though afraid to read the thought that might be in them, or to communicate the thought in his own. Though they themselves felt safe, the City was on the verge of panic—and suspicion is in the very air of panic.

'He must have gone to meet somebody, Pardoe.'

'Yes.'

'He said nothing to you?'

'No.'

'Nor to me. I'm going round to the bank now.'

'Yes. I shan't be going out. I'll wait—till you return.'

A few minutes afterwards, Mr. Percy Casselden entered the Bank of England—a brisk, robust man in the prime of life. The shade of anxiety on his face was not noticeable in the City, though it might have been elsewhere—so many men have anxious faces in the City. When he left it, fewer minutes had passed than years appeared to have passed, had the flight of time been calculated by the change in his appearance.

His face was grey, he could not close his lower lip on

his upper one, his body seemed twisted. A hansom was passing, with open doors. He fell into it. The driver was Sims, who recognised his fare, though his fare did not recognise him. He tried to say 'The Industrial, Moorgate Street,' but couldn't. However, the motion of his lips was sufficient.

Sims dashed off at such a pace that the sorely-trying policeman at the corner hesitated as to whether he should not pull him up. He was off his perch almost as soon as his fare had stumbled from inside, and was at the counter before the latter had reached the room beyond it.

'Gi' me a withdrawal form,' he said hoarsely; 'quick!'

'In Heaven's name, Casselden, what is it?'

'The worst! Purdyke's bolted! It's forgery—embezzlement—Ruin! Only this morning he finished the work of three days past; he had to wait till this very morning before he could lay his hands on the spoil. He's cleared out with at least a hundred thousand pounds!'

In words that poured out fast and thick, one on top of another, and yet in disjointed sentences, and they few in number, he told the story.

'It's a mercy he's only got a few hours' start. Waterloo's our only clue.'

'There may be another one here'—and Pardoe took up the pocket-book which had been brought back and opened it. An opened envelope fell from it to the floor. Each stooped to pick it up.

One held the envelope and the other a sheet of notepaper he had drawn from it. The envelope was addressed to Gregory Purdyke, Leigh Court, Herne Hill (his private residence), and the note it had contained was dated from Southampton the previous evening, and read—

'The *Cameron* will sail by to-morrow evening's tide. She cannot clear before; but I am mad with anxiety till we are safely aboard her.'

Casselden looked at the envelope—the postmark bore the same date as the letter. He replaced the latter within the former and the two within the pocket-book. His face was still grey, his voice still unfamiliar, but the one was firmer and the other steadier with the strength of set resolution.

'Waterloo—Southampton—the *Cameroon*. All one clue. Pardoe, I mistrust this clue, the scent seems too strong for it to be the right one. But at present it's the only clue; and I'm going.'

'Going! Where?'

'To Southampton. Get you to New Scotland Yard, and let the warrant be out against him without a

moment's delay. I'm off ahead of it. Warrant or no warrant, if I can get my hands on his throat, I'll bring him back, alive——'

He drew a bunch of keys from his pocket, selected one from the rest, and turned to the safe behind him, the door of which he flung open. Unlocking with a smaller key a drawer within the safe, he took out a revolver and examined every chamber to make sure that each was loaded. Then he placed the weapon in his breast pocket (where he had dropped the tell-tale pocket-book), and finished his sentence

'——if possible.'

CHAPTER III

IN CHASE

THE two directors left the bank at the same moment. Two hansoms pulled up at a nod from each. As they parted, their hands met in a hearty, sympathetic grip. Then one rattled away for New Scotland Yard, and the other for Waterloo, *en route* for Southampton.

As his cab struck into Cheapside Mr. Pardoe lifted the trap with hasty fingers. The thought had occurred to him that it would be as well to call at the office of the bank's solicitors and take one of them with him; it was only a few doors up a neighbouring thoroughfare on the near side.

'Stop at thirty-seven.'

'Yussir.'

The hansom pulled up with a jerk. Its occupant had already risen in readiness to spring out; his hand was laid loosely on the rail. A slight shower had been falling; the asphalt was neither dry enough nor wet enough to give a foothold for the iron-shod hoofs of

the horses. The spirited animal within the shafts of the hansom slipped; the cab oscillated in the vibration occasioned by its violent plunges to recover its balance. George Pardoe staggered, and his hand was shaken from the rail. With a lurch, he fell backward off the unsteady platform. His feet remained on it still, but his head touched the roadway: the next moment the near-side front wheel of a heavily-laden wagon coming on behind had gone over his neck!

A cry from those who saw the accident—but none from the victim of it. An excited crowd—some cool and calm policemen.

It was all over in a few minutes. The congested traffic had rolled on again; hurrying pedestrians passed up and down as though nothing had happened. The body of the unfortunate banker had been borne away. He had been picked up quite dead.

A 'special' would have saved no time, for the engine of the fastest express on the service was panting to be off—the guard was in the act of raising his whistle—as Mr. Casselden made his breathless way on to the platform at Waterloo.

With every mile of the lessening distance between London and Southampton, the excitement of the senior director of the Industrial increased. His brain seemed

to whirl with the whirling wheels of the train. Realising to the full the necessity of keeping cool in order to be able to deal with the actual and possible emergencies of the situation, he was conscious that every moment his power to think calmly, and consequently his capability to act discreetly, were getting more and more 'out of hand.'

But was this to be wondered at? Was not *all* at stake? Not only all that made his life worth living, but almost all that made his life possible to live. Solvency, honour, character, the good name on which no sullyng spot had ever rested yet, the position that had been slowly built up by years of honest planning, of strenuous effort; the position to achieve which he had shrunk from no self-denial, spared himself no labour, his beautiful home above the forest glades at High Beach, the future of his wife and boy—his only child—all, all were at stake, all in direst, almost hopeless, jeopardy.

And more still. The failure of the bank would bring ruin to a thousand frugal homes, break thousands of trusting hearts, turn perhaps thousands of white heads towards the grim walls of the workhouse. And without the money that had been provided to meet the expected, the practically inevitable, strain—the money which Purdyke had received at the Bank of

England and fled with—the bank *must* fail. No time would be given it to recover—its shutters would have to go up to-morrow. The forced sale of its assets that would follow would mean their sale at so much less than their potential value that when at last a delayed distribution of its effects was made, what would there be for each among so many?

Only one thought dominated him—to get his hands on the runaway before he could leave the country with his plunder—to get his honest hands on the thief's throat and drag him back.

As he neared his destination the prospect of doing this seemed to loom larger before his mental vision; his sense of the unreliability of the clue upon which he was acting seemed somehow to become smaller.

He was the first to alight from the train as it glided along the platform. Carrying his travelling-bag in his own hand, discarding, with an impatient gesture, the obtrusively proffered services of a porter, he strode rapidly out of the terminus.

As he passed the telegraph office, a thought struck him. His wife—he must telegraph to her; by this time the carriage might have returned home from the station—without him, of course—and his silence added to his absence would alarm her.

But no; for the first time he remembered that she

would be prepared for the latter, for only that morning it had been arranged between them that by a later train than the one he *had* come by he should journey to that very place to await Colin's arrival from Havre in the early hours of the next day. The actual bag he was carrying Colin's mother had packed. A clerk must have followed him with it and put it in the cab, and he himself had handled it mechanically, without a thought that its contents had been placed within it for the journey which had now an object and a purpose so different from those that had originally been its aims.

There was no need to telegraph, at least until the morning. Every moment was, or might be, too precious for a single one to be wasted, or diverted from the purpose that had brought him there by that earlier express.

With all possible speed he gained the waterside. Some fine-looking large vessels lay along the quay, and a larger number of smaller ones—steamers and sailing craft. As he eagerly scanned bows and sterns in search of the name of the ship he wanted, a burly, blue-clad man, who had been watching his movements with a gaze as close and intent as his own—with, in fact, a far keener though a less noticeable gaze—approached and addressed him, with a respectful but rough sort of salute.

'Beg your pardon, sir, but what ship might you be looking for?'

Casselden turned sharply to his questioner and answered instantly—

'The *Cameroon*. Do you know her? What is she? Where is she? Is she here? She was to sail with the tide—has she gone?'

'Yes. I know the *Cameroon*, sir. She's a "tramp."'

'A what?'

'A trading steamer—mostly trading between the London river and the ports o' Spain, and occasional the Cape and Mauritius.'

'But *now*—where is she now? Has she been here? Is she here now? Quick, man! every instant presses'

The seafaring stranger—whatever he was more precisely, his appearance precluded any doubt of his calling being upon blue water—noted his interrogator's peremptory style of address as well as his excited demeanour, but he in no way resented it, for he answered as civilly as he had spoken before.

'She put in here yesterday, sir, and cleared about a couple of hours ago.'

'Cleared! Where for?'

'Cherbourg, sir. That's her first port o' call. She's well on her way there by now.'

'Cherbourg? She's cleared for Cherbourg?'

'That's it, sir. Cherbourg; across there on the French coast.'

The clue might indeed be the right one after all. By far the greater portion of Gregory Purdyke's stolen spoil was necessarily in paper, to change which with less danger there would be more facilities at a Continental port, though Cherbourg was scarcely the first that one's thoughts would turn to. Still, for that very reason, there might be an object in choosing it, and, at all events, there led the clue he was following up—the only clue.

So ran Casselden's thoughts

So far, the clue had held good in three points: there *was* a steamer called the *Cameroon*, she *had* been at Southampton, and she *had* cleared by that early evening's tide. If it only held good on a fourth point, the fugitive was on board her. If he could but overtake her at Cherbourg, surely the captain or the port authorities would listen to such representations as would suffice to ensure the detention of the runaway while the authorities at home were communicated with.

'My man,' he said earnestly, trying hard to keep his voice under control, 'I have a few questions to ask of such importance that if you are able to answer them I'll pay you for every minute of time you can

save me which I should lose by putting them elsewhere. But can you answer them reliably? What are you?’

The man pointed a very steady—and a very dirty—finger towards a puffing little iron monster of a tug lying in the waterway.

‘You see that there tug, sir?’

‘Yes’

‘Well, she’s the *Tubal Cain*, and belongs to me. And I’m Tom Jarvis—at your sarvice, rhyme not intended, sir, but a accident.’

‘You sail her yourself?’

‘I do, unvariable. And though I says it, there ain’t a man in the port as can tell you anything about the shipping of the port as I can’t tell you. But as to paying, keep your hand out of your pocket, sir, please. I don’t take money for returning of a civil answer to a fair question, asked civil.’

‘I beg your pardon. Is it possible for me to get across to Cherbourg in time to intercept the *Cameroon*, or to get on the heels of a passenger—who may land there from her—before he can get clear of the town?’

‘By the next steamer, no—emphatic!’

‘By any other possible means?’

‘Is money a object?’

‘No. My business is more important than any question of money, life, or death’

Jarvis muttered, meditatively and undecidedly—

‘I *could* do it, though I never have’

The straining ears of the other caught the words, and he cried impulsively—

‘Could do what? Quick!’

‘Run you over myself in the *Tubal Cain* It’s about a level chance of catching her, but the only one—there ain’t no odds, either way o’ betting.’

‘When could you start?’

‘Now—steam’s up,’ was the laconic reply

‘Take me on board’—and Casselden made a quick, long stride towards the quay-stairs

But the tug-master wasn’t quite ready yet

‘Hold hard, sir There’s the boat—steam up, hands aboard, all ready for another job What’s this here unexpected job—this here job of yours—worth, if I take it on?’

‘Fifty pounds in any case—a hundred if you catch me the *Cameroon*, or get me across before it’s too late.’

Tom Jarvis’s face beamed, his eyes sparkled.

‘Your hand on it, and come on,’ he said. ‘Guv’ner, the deed shall be dood I’ll earn that hundred or sit on the safety-valve till the bi’ler busts!’

CHAPTER IV

'MAN OVERBOARD!'

THE servants had gone to bed, but Mrs Casselden was in her cosy sitting-room still. A happy look was on her comely, motherly face, for all her thoughts were very happy ones.

Colin was coming home—that was the burden of them all. For however short a time, till the day came when he would don uniform and join his ship, Colin was coming home. Already he had started—he would be well at sea on his brief homeward passage by now, and 'father' had gone to meet him. Long before that time to-morrow they would all be together again.

She worked out in fancy the future career of this only boy of hers—such a dazzlingly brilliant one it was in the colours in which she painted it. In the fond dream of glory in which she was indulging, his promotion from midshipman to admiral was almost as rapid and quite as irregular as it had been in the speeches of his schoolfellows at the farewell supper at Havre

Herself the daughter of a naval officer, in her heart she was proud to give a son to the same grand service, though she shrank with pain from some of the exigencies of that service. The clock on the mantel-piece chimed twelve; and the chiming brought her down from the clouds.

'Twelve o'clock! I must build no more castles in the air to-night,' she told herself laughingly, and rose to go upstairs.

In her bedroom, she moved for a minute the curtains from the window, and looked out into the night. The wooded, far-stretching valleys were all bathed in the white light that streamed down from moon and stars over the sleeping earth.

A calm and peaceful night, if it were like this at sea Colin would have a quick and pleasant and safe run across the Channel.

She drew the curtains close together and knelt beside the bed. And there her hopes became a prayer. Little she knew, little she thought, that as she prayed for absent husband and absent son both were in such dire peril that well might all who loved them pray.

Colin had an enthusiastic send-off. Most of his special chums were allowed to accompany him to the steamer to see the last of him.

Clyma minor manifested a strong inclination to make another melting speech just before they were all turned off the boat, but nobody was in the humour to stand such an infliction, and he had to yield to the force of public opinion. However, as he seized the hand of his departing schoolfellow in a final grip, he managed dramatically to implore him—

‘Look out for me as the fleet goes into action!’ and he led the ringing cheers which drowned the harsh echoes of the clanging shore-bell. It was no disgrace to ‘Admiral’ Casselden that his eyes were not quite above suspicion of having some sort of a distant connection with the water-tap as he leaned over the steamer’s side and returned the salute of the old chums he was leaving for ever.

‘A calm and peaceful night’; ‘a quick, pleasant and safe passage.’

The night *was* calm and peaceful; the run *was* quick and pleasant and safe—till the fog came down. Then it was no longer quick, for the engines were slowed; no longer pleasant, for the choking vapour hung like a white pall between sky and sea; no longer safe, for horn and syren sounded the warning story that the steamer was ‘in the track of ships.’

Cautiously, tediously, she crept on her laggard way over the invisible waves.

That Tom Jarvis meant business was evidenced from the rapidity of his actions. He moved his bulky form with true sailor-like agility, and assisted the unaccustomed limbs of his solitary passenger so adroitly that he scrambled on board the *Tubal Cain* scarcely a second after his conductor.

In a very few words Tom made clear to the two astonished hands on board the tug the urgency of the expedition, and before Mr. Casselden had recovered his lost breath she was under way. As she got her nose into the Solent he began to put a number of nervous questions to her skipper as to the likely speed at which the *Cameroon* would travel, the top speed of the pursuing *Tubal Cain*, and the probability of their being in time.

But the anxious Tom Jarvis was impatient of the landsman's questioning, and only replied, firmly as well as very bluntly—

'I've got a hundred pounds on this here job. Please to shut up, sir.'

The tug was heavy, dirty, strong, safe, and—it was soon evident—fast. Quickly—more quickly, more quickly still—she made her clumsy way through the darkening waters. Soon a long white track of foam lay astern of her, above which hovered a parallel line of black smoke. She heaved, pitched, rolled, and

tossed, but she travelled. The lights on shore grew dimmer and dimmer till they faded out of sight

Mr. Casselden walked forward from the stern and gazed longingly ahead, as though he would anticipate the sight of the gleaming lights on the farther coast. Then for a while he retired to the little cabin; but there he could not rest. Again he took up his station at the bows, where he could hear and see the hissing waters through which they cleaved their wild way. He could better realise so the quickness of the motion that was yet all too slow to keep pace with his desire.

A bitter cry escaped his lips as the fog came down. Something that sounded very like a curse broke from the lips of Jarvis, but at present he gave no order to moderate the pace of the puffing, tearing, snorting, straining little craft. For half an hour she drove on at full speed; then he stepped close to his passenger and touched him on the shoulder.

‘There’s danger to all of us in this. Shall I ease her down, or will you take the risk?’

‘We’ll take the risk. Keep her at the best she can do.’

‘Very good,’ said the skipper calmly.

For another half an hour she was kept to her course at the same mad rate. Then he spoke again—

‘There’s other craft about; there’s danger to others

besides us in this Shall I ease her down, or will you take the risk?’

Casselden hesitated He weighed the risks of which Jarvis knew and spoke against the risks of which *he* knew and did *not* speak

‘Risk and danger to others as well as to themselves’ Yes, there were, in either case, whether time were gained by forging ahead or lost by slowing down Upon the hazard of his catching up with Purdyke depended almost to a certainty the fate of so many, and their danger appeared to him to be the more imminent

The choice had to be made, and he was not long in coming to a decision

‘I’ll take the risk Keep her at the best she can do,’ he said again.

And again Tom Jarvis replied calmly—

‘Very good, sir.’

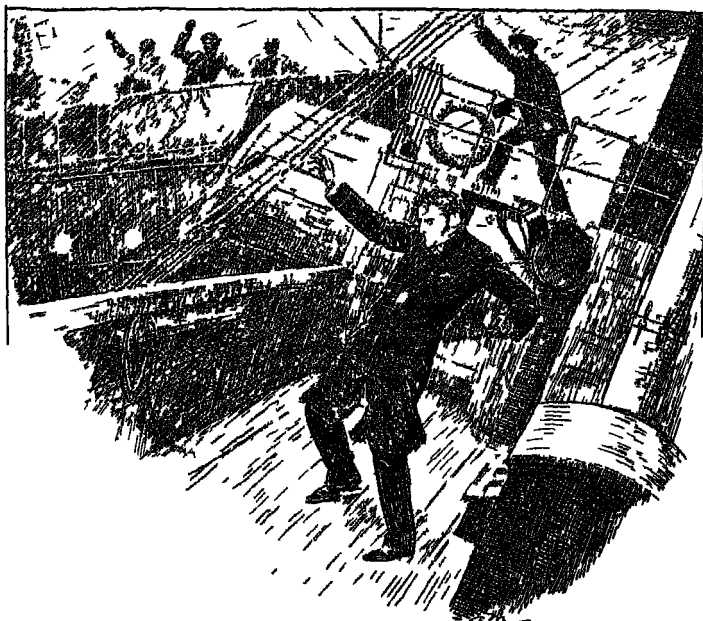
Almost as he spoke, a black shadow loomed up out of the white mist On one side of the black shadow glowed a great eye of red, and on the other one of green

Some wild and unintelligible shouts were followed by a crash as the slowly-moving black mass smashed into the tug amidships, just as her helm was being put over.

She shook as though dizzy from the shock of the sudden arrest of her wild progress, then canted, and

lurched, and rolled heavily to port. The terrible hiss of escaping steam mingled with the noise of the meeting of fire and water as the latter rushed inboard.

For some seconds she seemed to be foundering, then she cleared and righted herself.



ONE MAN HAD LOST HIS HOLD

But there were only three men aboard her now instead of four. One man, who had been standing forward, had lost his hold as she rolled on her side, and had been pitched headlong overboard.

And from the deck of the larger of the two colliding vessels, in the gleam of the long row of the cabin lamps, Colin Casselden had seen in the water the beating hands and white face of that ‘man overboard’—the face of his father!

CHAPTER V

A LEAP TO SAVE

TEMPTED first by the beauty of the night, subsequently, and more powerfully, by its dangers, Colin had remained on the deck of the mail steamer since she left Havre. Now with a leap he left it, to strike out for that floating, drowning form. A sailor who had just rushed up from below, carrying life-belts for the possible use of those on deck—he had received the order the moment after the collision—saw that leap from the bulwark to the water, for as he mounted to the former, Colin turned to him and snatched one of the belts from his hands.

The instant alarm the sailor raised increased the confusion prevailing on board the steamer. But it was soon discovered that she had herself received no serious damage, and was in no danger, and two boats were lowered.

Answering hails from the tug led one of the two in her direction, to find that she could keep afloat without assistance. A far fainter and more distant cry led the

second of the two boats in the contrary direction—that of the spot where father and son were battling to keep their heads above water. Both clinging to the one life-belt, they rose and fell with every wave—with every wave they drifted farther and farther away. Colin shouted as loudly as he could, but his voice, weakened by his struggle to reach and support his almost helpless, because almost unconscious, father, was muffled by the fog. For a while he ceased to shout, for suddenly his father's hands slipped from the belt—he threw them up and sank.

Down after him plunged the boy.

Prize swimmer though he was, when he came again to the surface, he was well-nigh exhausted. As he drew in his breath and closed his mouth for a second plunge, his father rose within a few yards from where he had disappeared. Again Colin—guided by sound rather than by sight—reached him, but it was now almost beyond his power to support him, for he himself was weaker still, and the other now quite helpless, though his hands yet beat the water mechanically.

The life-belt he had been compelled to abandon floated past just within touch. With the last active effort of which he was capable, he seized it and succeeded in slipping it beneath his father's shoulders

With his own left hand laid lightly upon it, he was just able to keep himself from sinking.

The *Tubal Cain's* only boat, and the *Tubal Cain* herself had now joined in the search. But no sign or sound of those they sought reached the seekers' eyes or ears. What time Colin's voice might have been heard again, he could not shout; what time, with recovered breath, he did raise again that voice, it came from too far, for he was powerless to swim against the drift that had all along carried him away—carried him and his senseless father to a greater and greater distance from the scene of the fall of the one and the leap of the other.

And by-and-by the search was abandoned, save that the *Tubal Cain* stood by, and did not finally steam away homewards till after the dawn had lifted the fog. The two boats of the mail-packet were hoisted aboard, and she resumed her course.

Tom Jarvis knew that he was much nearer the French than the English coast, and that he must steam but very slowly on account of the injuries his boat had had inflicted upon her, which could not be made properly good at sea, but he elected to run back to Southampton. Before heading her home, he cruised mournfully and hopelessly over a wide area from the spot where he had laid-to during the later hours of the night.

'It's no good,' he muttered, as he brought his glass down from his eye, 'no good. He said he'd take the risk, and he took it—but where's the risk took *him*?'

His glass went up again as he caught sight of some distant shipping that appeared to be standing out from the coast of France. Amongst it was a steamer that headed down Channel, and on this steamer he fixed his gaze.

'She is the *Cameroon*,' he exclaimed, 'we must have got more out of our course than I thought. There she goes—with my hundred pounds gone away with her,' he went on bitterly, shutting up the glass with a snap, 'I could just have caught her in time.'

That night will always seem to Colin what it seemed to have been on the day that followed it—a night made up of waking moments and of other moments when strange things happened to him in dreams.

He was awake—wide awake—when he saw the pale face of that struggling form beneath him, and awake when, the next moment, he made that plunge over the ship's side—that plunge to save a drowning father. He was awake when he heard the hail from those who sought to rescue them both, and awake when he dived—awake when he fixed the life-belt round his father's

body, and awake for a long time when they drifted and drifted and drifted.

Then it seemed as though he had slept, for he remembered nothing till they ran into that empty dinghy—the small yacht's dinghy that, without mast or sculls, was floating past them almost within touch.

But to grasp its gunwale he had to make a desperate stroke with both hands, leaving for that moment his father's side.

His cold, numbed fingers grasped it and held its side tightly.

Then, turning his head, he let go one hand and held it behind him. But no hand seized it—no voice answered his.

He dropped from the dinghy and swam despairingly round and round.

But his father had disappeared.

As he himself was sinking his tired hands struck something. It was the derelict dinghy again. He dragged his exhausted body over its side and fell between the thwarts.

But he was quite conscious when the fog lifted. It had been no dream—all was real: that drifting dinghy, the open sea—his lost father—how had it all happened? Why was his father crossing the Channel last night? Was he going over to bring him home—had there been

a misunderstanding in the arrangements for that home-coming of his ?

There had been moments—during the waking periods of that past night—when he had spoken to his father, and his father had been unable to reply, and others when his father had spoken to him, and he had been unable to understand

But what mattered the solution of the mystery? His father was lost. If he himself were saved, he would learn the explanation of what his dazed brain was puzzling at now—but what did it matter whether he were saved or not? His father was dead.

It *did* matter Perilous as his position was, he *must* save himself, he must get to shore, he must reach home, for—would not his mother cry for him in her widowhood ?

He sprang to his feet—falling the first time he rose, and then lifting himself more carefully With his hand shielding his eyes, for the morning light seemed to hurt them, he took a long, sweeping gaze around him

Sails, white sails and brown sails, and the smoke of a steamer, were in sight.

He could not go to them, would any of those sails come to him ?

The instinct of self-preservation growing stronger

every moment, he held himself straight and fluttered his white handkerchief in the breeze. And after a time it appeared that his signal had been observed, for a brown-sailed boat bore down upon him. He shouted as loudly as he could again and again, and whether his cries were heard or not, a louder hail presently came to him on the wind from the smack, which rapidly lessened the intervening distance, and brought to within a rope's throw of him.

A coil whizzed through the air. Colin caught the end of the rope as it fell over the dinghy, and was hauled to the smack's stern, where some strong red hands helped him aboard.

He was taken to the fire in the little cuddy, and warmed and dried, and fed and re-clothed. Those who tended him so kindly, spoke to him in French, and he answered them in their own tongue. Later in the day they spoke an English boat that had been fishing in the same wide grounds, and transferred him to her, and the English boat fetched Weymouth late that night—so late that Colin decided to stay for its few remaining hours on board. In fact, the friendly and sympathetic fishermen would not hear of his doing otherwise.

He slept later than he had meant to, and they would not rouse him, for they knew better than he did how sorely he needed the sleep of which he would have

deprived himself. And when at last his eyes did open, they had some steaming coffee, and the best breakfast they could prepare, all ready for him. With a 'Beg pardon, sir,' they asked him if he needed any money for the journey before him, but he found that the contents of his sodden purse were intact

He wrung the hand of every sturdy one of them as, with full heart, he bade them good-bye.

The London papers had arrived. Outside the first newsagent's shop as he entered the main street of the quaint old town were the placards of four of them. In type so conspicuous that it caught his sight at once they announced in almost identical phraseology the intelligence of the

FAILURE OF THE LONDON INDUSTRIAL BANK!

Absconding Directors.

WARRANTS OUT AGAINST CASSELDEN AND PURDYKE!

Death of a third Director in Cheapside.

DETECTIVES ON THE TRACK OF PERCY OLIVE CASSELDEN!

CHAPTER VI

THE HOME-COMING OF COLIN CASSELDEN

EVEN those upon whom the blow had fallen most heavily—even those who had lost their ‘little all’ by the bank’s failure—might well have pitied the suffering of Percy Casselden’s son as he read in cold, cruel, merciless words the printed story of his father’s ruin and disgrace—a story printed for all the world to read

The bank had closed its doors yesterday; for the money to meet the rush—the money which had been so carefully made available for that very purpose—was wanting. Upon the disappearance of the two principal directors, the inevitable construction had been put. It was even known that at least a hundred thousand pounds had been yesterday at their call at the Bank of England. The call had been made, the money withdrawn; with it had bolted Percy Casselden and Gregory Purdyke

The lips of the one being in the world who could have told the true story of Casselden’s action were closed for ever in the silence of death. As to the dead man’s

complicity in the fraudulent collapse of the institution, the papers were charitably reticent. His innocence or guilt would, they assumed, never be known, though it was admitted that the fact that he was ostensibly on his way to New Scotland Yard when he met with his fatal accident, might be made to bear a construction in his favour. In either case—in any case—he had gone to his last account.

The papers were unanimous in branding Percy Casselden as the chief criminal. For him no vituperation was too scorching. The founder of the original Society, he had ever been the first and foremost figure in its development. Never inaccessible, never absent from his post, he was always personally associated with every thought of the business which was to so large an extent subject to his control. He was, in fact, one of the best-known men in the City, and had been one of the most popular in every one of the many circles in which he was accustomed to move.

Purdyke was not spared, but he was made to appear (perhaps partly unconsciously) a smaller figure, as it were, crouching behind the bigger scoundrel.

Poor Colin's face blanched as he read. He felt stunned. It seemed that a full realisation of the horror of what he read would come to him, would fall on him presently.

And it did.

It was to escape, then, from the officers of the law, who would, he knew, soon be at his heels, that his father was crossing the Channel last night—to elude the hands of those who would have taken him into the felon's dock, and from the felon's dock to the doom of the convict.

The only passenger in the carriage in which he was seated of the train that hurried him to London, he lowered his head on the window-frame and gave way to an outburst of passionate and despairing grief.

His father's ruined character, indelible disgrace, his mother's woe, a woe more bitter far than the woe of widowhood, a woe that not even time would ever be able to alleviate—of these were his first thoughts: of his own wrecked career were his last.

Poor father, poor mother, poor son!

As to his own course—as to what he could do or should do—his only thought was a very plain, simple, and straightforward one.

'I'll do whatever it seems my duty to do.'

From Paddington he made his way by the Underground to the City, where an irresistible impulse moved him towards Moorgate Street

He stood outside the closed premises of the London Industrial Bank. An angry mob blocked the pave-

ment in front of them. In it were ruined women who wept, ruined men who cursed.

Colin shivered at the sobs, his blood boiled at the curses, for they all seemed levelled at his father's head. It was his father's name that was on every cursing lip.

At Liverpool Street a train was due out for Loughton in a few minutes. He waited on the platform till it was on the move, and then sprang into the guard's brake in the rear. In the train itself might be friends and neighbours who would recognise him, or whom he might recognise—and he could not face them yet.

He had telegraphed from Weymouth, the carriage from High Beach was awaiting him outside the station at Loughton. He walked quickly to it, it had drawn up a little apart from the other vehicles in waiting. He had only expected the pony trap.

The old coachman saluted his young master very gravely. The latter had no word of merry banter for him such as he usually greeted him with on coming home from school; no word of eager inquiry about his old pony, the dogs, the poultry—about the score of things, animate and inanimate, that it was his wont to ask about.

The blinds of the carriage were closely drawn, and it was not until he opened the door that he perceived that his mother was inside,

The heart of each was too full for many words in the first agitation of their meeting, and but few were exchanged between them as the carriage rolled swiftly through the quiet town. But on reaching the houseless Forest road on its other side, their over-charged feelings melted into fluent speech.

On one point Mrs Casselden had already made up her mind. Although the greater part of her own small private fortune had been swallowed up in the wreck of the *Industrial*, she would make no effort to retain possession of the property on High Beach. House, land, furniture, valuables—all should go to the creditors and shareholders and depositors, even to the value of the last farthing's-worth. All that she could give up she would give up.

‘But what will you do, mother, what will you do, if you part with all like this?’

‘I cannot part with quite my all—the settlements prevent it. I shall still have enough to live humbly on in some more humble home, and to pay your expenses, my boy, in the Navy.’

More firmly than he had spoken yet Colin spoke now—

‘Mother, I’ll never accept the sacrifice you would make for my sake. I shall not enter the Navy—now; do you think I would be such a tax upon you, mother?’

No—I'll try to help you, and I'll never be a burden on you. I'll work for you, mother, at whatever I can find to do.'

An evening paper lay upon the seat by his side. Observing it for the first time, Mrs. Casselden picked it up and opened it with feverish fingers. It might give news—later news. A startled cry from her quivering lips was followed by a moan and a shaking sob as she read aloud a head-line inserted as the sheet went to press, it had escaped Colin's aching eyes:—

'PERCY CASSELDEN TRACED TO SOUTHAMPTON!'

The paper fluttered to the floor of the carriage.

'They will take him!' she cried, 'they will take him! They will bring him back, and innocent as he is—he is innocent; though all the world seems howling his guilt, he is innocent, he is innocent, he is innocent—I know it, or I should die, but they will take him and bring him back and put him in the dock, and afterwards they will send him away; they will send him to prison and to death.'

Then Colin told his story. He had not told it yet—he had waited till she should be a little calmer, but he must tell it now. As yet, his mother did not even know why this home-coming of his was later by a day than it was to have been.

‘No, mother; no warrant can reach him where he has gone. No earthly judge can ever try him now.’

To his last day Colin will remember the next words he uttered. They could only have come from a broken heart. He could only have uttered them because his mother’s sob-choked words had conjured up so vividly before his eyes a terrible picture of capture, trial, condemnation—a capture, a trial, a condemnation that he felt would have been almost inevitable—otherwise.

‘No, mother,’ he repeated. ‘Thank God, my father is dead!’

CHAPTER VII

FAREWELL, OLD ENGLAND

A KEB and two 'orses was the dream of my life,' said Sam Sims the hansom driver, 'since the day of my hinfanticide I never 'ad a ordinary or cold-pork-and-kebbidge nightmare withaht a kebb being mixed up with it—the mare was always between the shafts of a kebb of my own. If ever I'm cut up for cat's-meat,' he went on recklessly, 'them there words will be fahnd writ on my 'eart—"A kebb and two 'orses"'

Sims had driven into his owner's yard—I mean the owner of what he drove—some hours earlier than usual, and had gone straight home to his little house in a respectable street off the Hackney road. Here, supper over, the youngsters packed off to bed, and the room 'tidied up'—he, his neat-looking buxom wife, and her nephew, Dick Bundick, were discussing, as they had over and over again before this evening, the results of the failure of the Industrial so far as those results affected the future and the present of the members of their own domestic circle.

Of that circle Dick Bundick was as intimately one as though his relationship to the other members of it had been that of son and brother instead of nephew and cousin; for of his seventeen or eighteen years of life all save one had been spent within it. His mother died before he had completed his first month of existence, and his father eleven months afterwards.

Sam's method of announcing his willingness to adopt the orphan mite was characteristically peculiar, and certainly open to criticism.

'Sam,' cried his wife, after opening a letter one morning, 'brother Joe's died in the hospital; poor little motherless Dick ain't got no father and no home now.'

'That's a lie, mate,' said Sam affectionately, and went off to drive his cab. But he had made his meaning and intention quite clear, for before he came home to enjoy his 'nose-bag' in the middle of the day, Mrs. Sims had brought the child there, and from Sam's manner it was quite evident that there he had expected to find him.

That was in the very early days of their married life—children of their own had been born to the kindly-hearted couple in pretty regular sequence since. Some had died, three still lived: Dick was just the eldest child, sharing neither better nor worse than the young ones. In due time he was sent to a Board School,

where his attention to his lessons was so assiduous that the worthy Sam 'couldn't make it out.'

'You did ought to be pleased that he minds his books so constant,' said his wife.

'So I am, Maria,' answered Sam. 'I'm pleased, but took aback, because it don't seem nateral I never minded *my* books, Maria. I shied at 'em and played the "wag" perpetual.'

'Which accounts for all you didn't learn and don't know,' was the crushing retort.

Dick was now a junior teacher where he had once been a pupil, and still resided in the old home

'A keb and two 'orses,' repeated Sam, 'were the climack of all my 'opes.'

'Climax,' suggested Dick softly

'No, Dick, no,' said his uncle urbanely; 'there were only one climack, but I worked for that climack day and night I j'ined the 'Dustrial, charged more than my lawful fare, put by every a'p'ny I could save, kep' the old woman short—yus, I did Maria; don't contradick me—all on accahnt of that climack. And I got there—mark yer, I got there.'

He was going over very familiar ground, but neither of his hearers would have interrupted him on any account.

'Yus, I got there right enough. The money was' in

the 'Dustrial, all a-ready and a-waitin'. In a month's time I should ha' been my hown howner. A keb and two 'orses was a-danglin' before my eyes, under my very nose. Then wot 'appens? The 'Dustrial busts, and busts my climack. I gets a climack, true enough, but the contrairey wrong sort o' climack. I shall never be a master kebman nahw as long as I live. The wrong climack 'ave tripped me up and throwed me dahn at a awk'ard time o' life. I ain't young enough to get up again easy, nor I ain't old enough to take it lyin' dahn. But that's where I am, and no mistake—dahh. Dick?'

'Yes, uncle?'

'You said last night as you 'd got somethink to put afore me—them was your words, my boy—to put afore me in these 'ere perwerse, aggrawatin', and contrairey-climacky circumstances.'

Young Bundick had been waiting for this.

'So I have,' he said at once.

'Well, Dick, you've got a 'ead on you, my boy, undoubted; and a heddicated 'ead, and I'm willin' for to listen to wotever's a-goin' to come aht o' that heddicated 'ead. Drive hon.'

'What's in my head now, uncle, has been there a long time. What put it there first was something the doctor told me a year ago.'

'The doctor?'

'Yes,' said Dick slowly. 'He told me that unless I got out of England I shouldn't live to see my twenty-first birthday.'

It was quite evident from the amazed looks of his uncle and aunt that they had had no inkling of this news before. True, they had sometimes commented on the paleness of his face and his want of muscular strength, but they had attributed both only to the rapidity of his growth and the sedentary nature of his occupation.

'The doctor told you that?' they exclaimed together, then plied him with anxious and loving inquiries.

'Yes, he told me so first a year ago, and repeated it more strongly last week. It was the doctor who first turned my thoughts to the idea of emigrating. I wouldn't say anything about it before, but now seems the time.'

'A-hemmergrationatin'! Where to?'

'He recommended New Zealand, uncle, but gave me a pretty wide choice of other places. I've been studying the statistics of various countries, and have learnt a good deal of the chances and prospects offered by each.'

In his own quiet way he proceeded to prove this by retailing the information he had acquired, his two hearers becoming more and more fascinated as he described in detail the ways of life in all sorts of

strange places of which they had hitherto known little more than the names.

‘I know that I’m handicapped pretty badly,’ he said at length: ‘but others have gone out to the Colonies in weak health and become strong and wealthy men there, and have been able to make good homes for those who were kind to them when they needed help and kindness. And that is what I want to do,’ he added earnestly and meaningly. ‘Why shouldn’t I be able to do the same as others have done before me?’

‘Nowadays it isn’t always those who go out strongest who get on best—there’s more room in the Colonies for head-work than there used to be before the big cities were built. I know that many fail, and I shouldn’t go if I could live here, but as I’ve got to go, let’s look at the bright side of things. Let’s look forward to the time when I can send for you all to come out to me, or send you the money, uncle, to buy a yard full of cabs and horses over here.

‘I know that ever since the smash of the Industrial you’ve seen nothing for it but years and years of hard work before you could make good your loss. I can’t help you here, but I’ll try hard to help you where I’m going. You and aunt looked after me when I was young, I mean to look after you when you are old: and to help you to recover from this blow, I hope, long

before then, for it would take the ages of both of you put together to make either of you old yet.'

A long pause of silence followed, the sense of coming separation was settling coldly down into the hearts of all three. Sam was the first to break the silence.

'Where *are* you a-goin'?' he asked. 'Say the names of some of them there places again.'

'There's the Cape—I thought a good deal about the Cape at one time, but things are so unsettled there now—New Zealand, Tasmania, Australia——'

'Whoa!' cried Sam. 'That's the place—Orsetraylyer—there's the straight tip in the very name, there's a Orse in it, and I've been used to 'orses all my life'

'But *I* haven't, uncle,' said Dick with a laugh.

'*I* 'ave,' insisted Sam again firmly, 'and I therefore says as Orsetraylyer is the place for me'

'For you!' screamed Maria.

'You, uncle?' echoed Dick

'Yus, Maria. I pricked up my hears soon as ever I see where Dick 'ere was a-drivin' to. As I follered of 'is words, I says gradual to myself, "I'll foller of 'is lead." If hemmergrationatin' is 'is game, there's more can play at it than one. It's a all-rahnd game, a-hemmergrationatin' is. I'm that miserable that I'd just as soon 'ook it as do anythink else. Kebs don't seem to be wot they was to me nahw. Dick 'ere's got

to go—I can see that plain; that's 'is climack—and why shouldn't we all go along of 'im ?'

'What! me, and them precious children upstairs scarcely in their teens''

'Yus, old woman; you, *and* me, *and* the kids, *and* Dick. There's more room for us all to kick abaht aht there—aht in Orsetraylyer—than in this crahded-aht old country, as Dick truly p'int's aht'

'You ain't never serious, Sam ?'

'I ham. I mean it, straight.'

The fact was, Sam Sims had been brooding over this very idea of trying his luck in a new country for days past, though he would probably never have got beyond the brooding stage but for Dick's unexpected disclosure. But Dick's enthusiasm—partly real and partly simulated—had carried his uncle off his legs, so to speak, and had caused his previously nebulous idea to appear suddenly practicable.

'You'll change your mind to-morrow,' said his wife.

But he didn't. He came home even earlier than on the previous day, and carried the matter so far that that very evening it reached the stage of a discussion of ways and means.

The result of that discussion made it clear that the proceeds of a sale of available effects, added to Dick's savings, and the total of three amounts standing to the

credit of the three youngsters in the Post Office Savings Bank—placed there in stamps, coppers, and small silver by their mother at irregular but frequent periods since the birth of each—would show a sum sufficient to take the family (of course at steerage rates) a long voyage, and leave a small balance as the nest-egg of their future fortunes

Even Maria was at last reconciled to the idea, the lapse of days betraying no wavering on the part of Sam, and the youngsters were wild with delight

But the latter were doomed to disappointment, for in the nick of time wiser counsels prevailed amongst their elders. It was decided that Sam and Dick should go out first and make a home to which the others could follow

What clinched this decision was an unexpected offer by Mrs Sims's only surviving brother, a very mean old widower, who worked very hard as a very small farmer in Wiltshire, to whom she wrote to apprise him of the intended emigration. This bereaved brother had already worked out in figures the estimated pecuniary annual loss which the recent death of his wife would cost him. His sister being country-bred, and having worked in a farmhouse till her marriage, on receipt of her letter he made another calculation, which convinced him that it would pay him to offer her and her children a temporary

home in return for her services as housekeeper, cook, and 'general' rolled into one, to say nothing of the odd services he could get out of her two boys and one girl. So he made the magnanimous offer which his calculation showed him would be a prudent one, and it was accepted.

In deference to sundry representations urged by Dick, Sam consented to waive his predilection for 'Orsetrayler' in favour of New Zealand.

The proliminary steps were taken, the hour of parting arrived—and on a fair autumn evening Sam and Dick found themselves afloat for almost the first time in their lives, steerage passengers aboard the *Iron Duke*, Captain Harry Bridge, bound from the Thames to Hobart Town, Tasmania, and Dunedin, in the South Isle of New Zealand, calling at the Mauritius.

As, in the dusk of the early night, they passed, off Gravesend, an incoming steamer of similar size, each vessel showing its red port-side light to the other as it went by, according to the rule of the road at sea, Sam clutched his companion nervously by the arm, and exclaimed in a frightened voice, pointing excitedly to the other ship—

'Dick, we're on a wrong 'un. The captain o' this 'ere *Iron Dook* ought to 'ave 'is licince endawsed—he's a-drivin' on the horf side!'

As day followed day (it was Colin's painful experience on one of them to be waited upon by two detective officers, to whom he told the story of his father's end at sea), the faint hopes that Mrs Casselden had cherished that by some strange chance her husband might have been saved, died away

'He will never come back to me now,' was her despairing cry—'he can never come back to clear himself—never come back to prove that he was not what they call him, never did what they say he did The innocent son of an innocent father, my boy must bear through all his life, and take with him to his grave, a wrongly dishonoured name'

She acted without delay upon her resolution to surrender even what the law would have allowed her to keep, and Colin as firmly refused to swerve from his determination to abandon all thoughts of following the profession of his choice in the terribly altered circumstances of their life As far as was possible he prevented his mother from hearing or reading what, with never decreasing bitterness, continued to be said and written of his father, but the loud echoes of the roar of the storm of public reprobation—of public execration—could not fail to reach her ears

And one night she utterly broke down Turning to Colin with pleading hands and streaming eyes, she said .

'Oh, Colin! take me away, take me away—take me that I may live and die far away. In the far-away home in Tasmania, of which they have both written so much, live your aunt and her husband—my playmate as well as my sister's, when we were both children. She is all I have left in the world now save you, Colin—save you. Take me to her. Let us go far away across the sea. Surely, so far away, people will not be so quick to think and say such bitter things, such terrible things, of—of a dead man. Let us go, Colin, Take me. Take me far away.'

That was the burden of all her longing and her appeal—to be taken 'far away'.

Colin's bruised heart bounded at the prospect of striking out a career for himself in the distant land where the relatives he had never seen, but who had always kept up such a loving correspondence with his mother, had thriven so well and were so happy.

Further and quieter conference proving that Mrs Casselden had really set her mind upon making a new home in her sister's adopted country, he eagerly undertook the necessary arrangements for the voyage.

And it happened that in the operation of those arrangements he and his mother took passages in the ship that bore also the uncertain fortunes of Samuel Sims and Richard Bundick.

CHAPTER VIII

'IN THE QUEEN'S NAME'

A SHORT, slight, thin, but well-set-up man—quiet, alert—had been hanging about Paddington Station all the morning, and he was there still—mid-time between noon and evening

He had kept up, and was keeping up still, a watch upon the crowds that entered and the crowds that left the terminus, but the former seemed to interest him more.* He watched keenly but unobtrusively, as one who would scrutinise everybody, but would himself remain unnoticed, and who was used so to watch. Once or twice a very slight recognition had passed between him and some of the railway officials, and once or twice he had spoken with the policeman on duty.

Several times he had strolled into one or other of the refreshment-rooms, patrolled the platforms, visited the bookstalls, but he had never stayed long away from the neighbourhood of the booking-office.

About half an hour before the advertised time for the departure of the early evening express for Plymouth,

a four-wheeler drove up to the main entrance and deposited its solitary fare and several heavy trunks and iron-bound boxes.

At such a station there was nothing unusual in the arrival of an intending passenger with such baggage, nor was there anything to attract attention in the appearance of the gentleman to whom this particular baggage belonged. But for some reason or another he did attract the attention of the man who had been so long on the watch for—somebody.

This man took a close, though apparently a casual, look at both fare and luggage. He stood a little apart as a truck was trundled up for the removal of the latter. Their owner—retaining a valise in his own hand—followed the trunks and boxes, and the watcher followed him. He was a witness to the careful registration of each receptacle, with the exception of the valise.

The gentleman walked to the ticket-window. A good many people were waiting to take their tickets; but somehow, when he stood at the pigeon-hole, the other man had edged his way next to him, and heard him say briskly—

‘Plymouth, single—first.’

But when the other man also said—‘Plymouth, first—return,’ nobody heard *him* but the clerk. He spoke

distinctly, but as one who was not in the habit of speaking loudly

The single-ticket passenger made his way to the train, looking in as he passed the guard’s brake to make sure that his carefully-labelled property was all safe. The return-ticket passenger watched him with the furtive, uncertain air with which he had regarded him ever since his arrival. He didn’t seem to be watching anybody else now. To a close observer—a very close observer indeed—his face might have betrayed two emotions—hope and doubt

But there was no hesitation about his movements. He walked straight to the telegraph office and despatched a message. Then he returned to the platform and passed and repassed the carriage, in the farther corner of which the other had seated himself, and just as the train was moving he jumped into the carriage.

A shade of annoyance—was there a momentary suggestion of fear in it?—clouded the face of the passenger ensconced in that farther seat, as the new-comer invaded the apartment, he had already removed his gloves, and adopted the free-and-easy attitude of a man who contemplates a long ride without company. The new-comer noted the look as he carelessly lolled into an opposite seat, and opened a paper.

He had seated himself in the best seat for taking stock of his companion—and from over the edge of his paper he took it as the train sped on. The other shifted his position so that the light did not fall so directly upon his face, but the man who had been looking at him had come to the conclusion that sundry artifices had been employed in the making of his toilet, and that he had not long been in the habit of shaving his upper lip. He had also formed the opinion that his fellow-traveller had until a recent period been accustomed to wear heavy rings on his fingers.

By and by he opened conversation, but not until some thirty miles or more of the journey had been accomplished. His overtures in the direction of friendly intercourse were for a time politely rebuffed, but he persisted so adroitly that the talk gradually became quite animated—though it was the thin man who started every topic. It was with the skill of a diplomatist that he turned the conversation round from very different subjects to City topics, especially to banking.

With the skill now of a cunning fisherman luring a wary trout, he drew from his *vis-à-vis*, who had shied at the introduction of this subject, replies which satisfied him that he knew all about it

For some five minutes he was silent, then he asked

sharply and suddenly, with his ferret-like eyes fixed full on his companion’s face—

‘What about the Industrial?’



‘I ARREST YOU IN THE QUEEN’S NAME!’

The momentary pallor, the quick, hot flush, the tell-tale gleam of two shrinking eyes, that rapid turn to the window—he saw them all.

But he didn't see that as he turned to the window the fingers of his companion's right hand sought the inside pocket of his coat, where they touched the handle of something. And he didn't see what the other saw—that some lights right ahead were the lights of a viaduct that spanned a flooded river.

His observations had confirmed the clue of which he had had the 'tip.' Now was the time to act.

His voice was quite calm, but there was a triumphant ring in it as he stated his name and his connection with the Criminal Investigation Department at New Scotland Yard, adding, as he laid a strong hand on that still averted shoulder—

'I have reason to believe that you are Gregory Purdyke—and I arrest you in the Queen's name!'

CHAPTER IX

THE STRANGE SICKNESS OF SAMUEL SIMS

PUTTING in at Plymouth only to pick up her last passengers, the mighty engines of the *Iron Duke* were soon throbbing away again.

She made the Bay in fine time, scooted down the Spanish coast, passed the Rock, raced through the Mediterranean, crawled through the Canal, did her level best in the Red Sea, and entered the Straits of Bab-el-Mandeb, plunged into the Indian Ocean, and headed for the Mauritius.

'Let's see,' said Captain Bridge one day, after taking her bearings—'let's see, the mail left Plymouth two tides ahead of us. We shall fetch the Mauritius, at the average we've done, on the fourth day after her—the *Duke's* doing all I ask her to.' The *Iron Duke* was not an 'ocean greyhound.' She carried a heavy cargo as well as a considerable, though limited, number of passengers.

Amongst the passengers was one whose name figured on the ship's list as the Reverend Simeon Felton. He

was a saloon passenger, and appeared to appreciate the luxury of his state cabin, for during the first week he scarcely left it. It was understood that Neptune had treated him with no greater respect or consideration than those of his non-reverend fellow-passengers who showed a similar disinclination for society and their meals; in fact, with less, for he was the first to disappear into seclusion and the last to reappear.

When at length he did emerge into the light of day and took his place regularly at the breakfast, luncheon, and dinner table, he proved to be a hale old gentleman of insinuating manners and a capacious appetite. The snowy whiteness of his hair gave him a patriarchal appearance a little at variance with the sprightliness of his step and the firm and erect carriage of his body.

His address was suave and bland, and he smiled a great deal. He gave those with whom he entered into conversation to understand that he was returning to missionary labour amongst the Australian blacks—'my poor blacks' he called them with a fatherly air—after visiting some of his old friends and parishioners amongst the Tasmanian settlers.

'You have been in Tasmania before, then, sir?' said Colin, the first time he heard him speak thus familiarly of the native inhabitants of the regions to which he

was journeying, and about which he was naturally eager to learn anything he could

‘Yes, yes, my dear young friend—oh, yes,’ returned the clergyman.

Colin plied him with questions, to all of which he replied smilingly, amiably, and in general terms. It struck his questioner that his stock of actual information was not added to by the conversation, he had read already all that the Reverend Mr Felton seemed able to tell him

‘Let me see—I think I heard your name mentioned’

‘My name is Colin Casselden. I don’t think you have heard me addressed by it’

This impression was confirmed by the momentary start of the old gentleman at the mention of the notorious name of Casselden. Colin flushed painfully as he noticed that momentary, irrepressible start. He squared his shoulders defiantly as he added, looking Mr Felton full in the face—

‘I am the son of Percy Clive Casselden.’

‘Ah—yes, yes, of the——’

‘Late of the London Industrial Bank.’

‘And the lady with whom you are travelling?’

‘Is my mother’

‘So I presumed. Ah—yes, yes,’ said Mr. Felton uneasily. ‘And you are both going to Tasmania to settle there?’

'Yes,' answered Colin shortly. Something in his interrogator's manner or look—or both—annoyed and irritated him

The more he saw of him the less at ease he felt in his company. He was conscious of a vague feeling of distrust and dislike.

On the present occasion he cut the interview short, and strolled forward. Here he made the acquaintance of Sam and Dick, with whom he got on so splendidly that it soon became his practice to seek them for a chat. Though the privileged portion of the ship was forbidden ground for them, he, of course, was free to mingle with the steerage passengers as much as he chose.

The ex-cabman and his nephew soon learnt their new friend's name.

'Yus,' said Sam, in answer to Dick's quick question, 'the young toff's the spit of the old toff. I wonder I didn't spot 'im for 'is father's son the hinstant I see 'im. There ain't a daht abaht it But, I say, Dick!'

'Yes, uncle'

'Not a word to the young toff abaht—you know.'

'Not a word, uncle,' returned Dick, comprehending at once. 'He's not responsible for his father's sin, poor young fellow.'

And not a word passed the lips of either to let Colin know that one of them at least was amongst the victims of the ruined bank

On the ship's first Sunday at sea, Mr Felton had been wholly invisible. On the second Sunday, Captain Bridge suggested to him, as the only clergyman on board, that he should celebrate Divine worship. The missionary excused himself on the plea that he was not quite free from some lingering qualms of sea-sickness. On the third Sunday morning, at the breakfast-table—barely more than a fortnight out—the invitation was repeated, and this time accepted, but accepted, Colin could not help thinking, reluctantly and nervously.

However, the word was passed that service was to be held, and the officiating minister could not complain of the number of his congregation. Perhaps because they had nothing else to do, almost all the passengers of every class attended the function, and all the officers and men not on duty were also mustered aft to take part in it.

Captain Bridge ascended the poop with the clergyman, and himself placed Bible, prayer-book, and hymn-book on the improvised lectern. Then, baring his head in simple, sailor-like reverence, he stepped into the midst of his little group of officers and waited for the service to begin.

Mr. Felton, who had not robed himself, lifted the prayer-book. He fumbled about the pages for what seemed a long time before he succeeded in finding the proper places for the insertion of the reference ribbons. When he did begin he pronounced the opening sentences of the appointed order in a faltering, hesitating voice, such as no one would have expected to hear from a clergyman of his age and experience. He read, in fact, as though the exercise were an unaccustomed one—or so it seemed to others besides Colin and his mother, who stood together close to the group of officers.

But—with an effort he did not succeed in disguising—Mr. Felton conquered his nervousness, and went on with the service impressively and fluently until he reached the first psalm. As he turned over the leaves, he raised his eyes for a moment from the book, and in that moment he met the eyes—directed point-blank upon him from the rear of his congregation, and themselves full of a puzzled, suspicious expression—of Sam Sims. In the isolation of steerage from saloon, they had not previously seen each other on board.

Why should Sam look at him like that?

At that moment of the meeting of their eyes, the prayer-book slipped from the minister's hands and fell on the white deck of the poop. He bent to recover it

at the instant that Colin took a quick step forward and stooped for the same purpose.

Colin's hands were on it first. Before either head was raised he heard distinctly a muttered curse—a blasphemous oath—from the lips of the Reverend Simeon Felton, and as he put the book into his hands he knew from the other's face that that other knew he had heard it.

But with a slight bow of thanks Mr. Felton took the offered volume quickly from his hand, and proceeded decorously with the service till its close. He uttered the final benediction in a clear, ringing voice, and the worshippers dispersed.

With that muttered oath the whole expression of his countenance so changed that it was as though a mask had fallen for a second from it. And Colin knew that the other was conscious that he had seen the mask fall, quickly as it was assumed again.

'Dick,' said Sam Sims, as he and his nephew regained their own quarters, 'I am a-goin' to bed.'

'To bed, uncle, in the middle of the day! What's the matter with you?'

'I'm a-croakin'—at least I'm a-goin for to be a-croakin' as soon as I get to bed. I'm a-dyin', and want to see the clergyman afore I go orf the 'ooks:

that's my lay; that there clergyman wot's been conductin' service so beautiful. I want to get a closer look at 'im.'

'Want to get a closor look at him?'

'Yus.'

.' What on earth for?'

For a moment Sam looked as though he were going to answer the question, but he decided not to, at present.

'Wait till I've measured 'im hup,' he said, 'then I'll tell yer. My idea is he ain't wot he seems, but just you wait, Dick, till I've seen 'im close. I'm a-goin' to my bunk nahw straight away, to start hollering. When I hollers you bring the stooord. Stooord sends the docter and the docter sends the clergyman. I'll work it all right, and after I've seen the clergyman I'll let yer know.'

A few minutes afterwards a stentorian voice was heard to proceed from the neighbourhood of Sam's berth. The voice was roaring—

'Stooord! I'm a-dyin'! Send for the clergyman!'

'Steward,' said Dick to that overworked functionary, 'there's a man shouting for you with all his might.'

'All right; I can hear him. Somebody took bad again, I suppose; thought we'd done with the basins by this time'—and the steward leisurely obeyed the call of the still shouting voice.—

'What's up?' he asked, as he approached Sam's bunk.

'Stooerd' roared Sam, 'bring the clergyman. I'm a-dyin' I'm a-goin' of it, stooerd—I mean I'm goin' fast'

'What's the matter with you?'

'I've got a—a sort of a kind of a sinkin' feelin' all over. My legs is a-givin' way at the knees I'm a-goin' for to come a cropper Basin! No, no!—I mean clergyma—an' Trot 'im aht, quick' Tell 'im I've got the delirioriums tremums. Stop!—I'd better 'ave a more religious complaint as he's a parson; say I've got the staggers fatal.'

The steward was at length persuaded that there really was something the matter with him, and he moved from the sick man's side to go and report to the captain, Sam calling after him—

'If the reverend bloke won't come for the staggers, tell 'im I've got the glarnders.'

Colin was present when the report was made to Captain Bridge, and so, as it happened, were both the doctor and the clergymen whose attendance upon the dying man was so clamorously demanded.

'A steerage passenger has been took bad, sir; says he's dying, and wants the clergyman at once, sir.'

The doctor stepped forward at the words—the clergy-

man hung back. Several times during the short interval since morning prayers he had tried to make up to Colin, as though he would fain say or do something to efface from the latter's mind the impression of that terrible oath—all the more horrible because of the circumstances in which it was uttered—and the look that had accompanied it. But Colin would have none of him.

‘Perhaps the medical had better precede the spiritual adviser,’ suggested Captain Bridge with a smile. He was accustomed to hear that sea-sick passengers believed themselves to be dying.

‘Certainly,’ acquiesced Mr Felton, ‘you see the man first, doctor, and—and let me know.’

‘All right,’ agreed Dr Hamilton carelessly. ‘Lead on, steward.’

‘I’ll come with you,’ said the captain.

They returned together in a few minutes.

‘Well?’ asked Felton.

‘He’s shamming,’ said the doctor decisively. ‘It’s a case of obvious malingering, though with what object I can’t conceive.’

‘At all events,’ put in Bridge, ‘there’s no shamming about the man wanting to see a clergyman—and you’re the only one on board. You’ll go to him, sir, of course?’

‘Of course.’

‘What’s the man’s name, captain?’ inquired Colin;
‘you know I’ve made a few friends forward’

‘Samuel Sims’

‘He’s one of them So *I’ll* come with *you*,’ said Colin to the clergyman Foreseeing a protest from the expression of Mr Felton’s face, he added, ‘if you will allow me’

‘I can have no objection, unless my possible penitent should have one,’ was the pious reply. ‘I’ll go to him now, or I shall be late for lunch.’

CHAPTER X

ABEL GIRDLESTONE THE DETECTIVE

AS they made their way forward Colin could not help attributing his companion's preoccupied looks to an uncertainty on his part as to the course to be pursued in the coming interview. If this were so, the uncertainty soon gave place to resolution. He approached the 'dying man's' sick-bed with a firm step, and addressed him in quick, incisive tones.

'You wished to see me, my man?'

'Yus, sir. I'm afraid I'm going to kick the bucket.'

'What's the matter with you?'

How many more times was the malingering cabby to be called on to answer this question?

'I've got the megrums, sir. I'm givin' way at the joints, and I'm dead orf my nose-bag. Also I'm spavined, sir, as is uncurable; and likewise I'm a roarer. I thought as p'raps yer wouldn't mind settin' close to me and readin' of a chapter to a dyin' crock. I should like one with somethink abaht 'orses in it. Ah, Mr. Casselden'—as he perceived our hero—'so

you've come to see me take my 'ook too Very kind of yer, sir, and I take it kind. Will yer draw them there boxes closer up, so that this 'ere reverend clergyman can sit beside me ?'

'Yes,' said Colin.

'No,' said old Mr. Felton sharply

As he spoke, he moved quickly to the side of Sam's bunk, and, drawing himself up, stood full in the light that streamed in from the open port. Sam leaned his head out of the bunk and regarded him intently. He did not shrink from the scrutiny

'My man,' he said calmly, 'I shall not read you a chapter. You did not wish me to do so. All you wanted was to have a good, close look at me—a better and closer look than you were able to get at me on the poop a while ago Perhaps you suppose I didn't notice you then, but I did. You thought you knew me It is likely enough that you have met me before in another character, but when you know in what character—when you hear who and what I am—perhaps you won't be so anxious to claim a previous acquaintance with me'

'In another character?' exclaimed Colin

'Yes. I shall have something to say to you, too, directly, for your behaviour has also shown suspicion and distrust; but you can wait your turn.'

He turned again to the bewildered Sam Sims.

'Whoever you took me to be, you didn't take me to be who and what I can prove I am. You made a mistake?'—and once more he met unflinchingly the full glare of his 'penitent's' eyes.

'Yus,' admitted Sam slowly, as he withdrew his eyes; 'I must ha' done, or you couldn't look at me like that.'

'What's the meaning of all this mystery?' cried Colin.

'Come—both of you—to my cabin after luncheon, and you shall know. To you, at least, Mr. Casselden, the surprise in store for you won't be an agreeable one, but I can't help that.' And without another word the Reverend Simeon walked out.

Colin plied the now fully-recovered sick man with questions, but 'Excuse me, sir, the thoughts wot I 'ad I'd rather keep to myself,' he said. 'Somethink may come of 'em after all,' he added ominously, as though to himself.

Immediately 'tiffin' was over Colin sought Sam again, and together they repaired to Mr. Felton's cabin. They found him seated at a handsome little table screwed to the floor of the centre of the apartment, some papers spread out before him.

'I won't ask you to sit down,' he began coolly, 'because I want you to stand behind me and read over my shoulder'

His visitors placed themselves in the position suggested. He opened a paper and held it flat on the table, face up.

'Read this first,' he said curtly. 'Have you finished?'—after a brief interval.

'Yes,' said Colin.

'No,' said Sam. A minute after he replied to a repetition of the question, 'Yus,' adding, 'here's a climack!'

'Who and what am I?—what you have read for yourselves being the source of your information'

Colin replied for the two—

'You are Detective-Officer Abel Girdlestone, of New Scotland Yard.'

'That is so, and my present disguise as a clergyman on board this ship is a purely professional disguise, adopted at my own discretion for reasons which there is no necessity for you to be made acquainted with, so ask nothing about them. I'm on special service. One of the two men we want I actually had my hands on coming from London to Plymouth. It doesn't matter how he escaped—he did escape, and others will have to look after him now.'

Colin couldn't help the twitching of his lips as he got out the question—

'You said you were in pursuit of two men—who are they?'

The detective answered the question as though he had been waiting for it.

'The absconding directors of the London Industrial Bank—Gregory Purdyke and Percy Clive Casselden.'

Colin saw the pitiful look in Sam Sims's honest face. It told its own story. This rough Cockney cabman had known all along of his identity as the son of the proclaimed swindler, but no hint of his knowledge had ever fallen from his lips or been betrayed in his manner. And now he hung his head as though his own shame instead of that of another had been laid bare.

Colin held out his hand and Sam pressed it between his hard fingers. That hand-shake was at once the token and the pledge of an understanding which, through thick and thin, was never to be broken. Somehow it strengthened Colin's voice as he said—

'Mr. Girdlestone, with all my heart I hope that Gregory Purdyke will be found and brought to justice. As for the other' (his voice only faltered for a moment) 'whom you named in the same breath, he has passed beyond pursuit. He is dead.'

A hard smile played about the officer's lips as he replied—

‘We have reason to believe that you are mistaken I



IT WAS ABEL GIRDLESTONE'S WARRANT FOR THE ARREST OF HIS FATHER

know the whole story even beyond your knowledge of it.’

‘What can you know beyond what I know and have told?’ asked Colm eagerly

‘We have reason to believe,’ was again the cautious

formula, 'that Percy Clive Casselden was picked up by a passing ship, still breathing, and that that ship is now approaching the Mauritius *via* the Cape. At the Mauritius I hope to effect his capture, or to take him over from those who may have arrested him before we arrive. Will you look over my shoulder again and read *this* ?'

He spread out a second and larger paper. With a sickening heart the poor boy read it.

It was Abel Girdlestone's warrant for the arrest of his father.

CHAPTER XI

THE GAME'S UP

VERY gently, very lovingly, very tenderly Colin told his mother—she must be prepared for the blow of his father's coming arrest or it would kill her

The days that followed were sad days for both of them, and perhaps the silent wakeful nights were sadder still, for in the heart of each was the sleepless agony of the knowledge that, according to the information on which Girdlestone was acting, the father of one and the husband of the other was now within a rapidly shortening distance of the grip of the law

Even Mrs. Casselden would now have been devoutly thankful if she could have thought once more that death had taken him beyond the reach of his pursuers; for though her own faith in his innocence was unshaken, she had realised with the lapse of time that appearances, that all available evidence, were so terribly complete against him that his acquittal was beyond hope. Day and night she was weighted down with the heavy burden

of the conviction that his certain apprehension would soon be followed by his certain conviction

Once or twice the mad idea seized her of appealing to Abel Girdlestone to betray his duty, to be false to the trust of his office, to accept the bribe of everything she possessed to let her dear one go free ; but even while such thoughts possessed her she trembled at the dishonour they brought with them and felt their bleak hopelessness.

So she sought no interview with him. On the contrary, she spared herself the pain of even seeing his face. She avoided the occasions and the places when and where she would have been obliged to meet him, and so far as possible Colin imitated her example. He could not trust himself in the presence of the man who was armed with the death-warrant upon which his own eyes had rested—the death-warrant, it seemed to him, of three lives.

The bright faces of the other passengers, their happy smiles, their gay laughter as they gathered in groups and in couples upon the awning-covered promenade, and chatted and gossiped in the brilliant sunshine or flirted in the cool of the brief eventide and the starry stillness of early night, seemed to hurt him, to jar upon him.

Sometimes, as he looked at the manly, open coun-

tenance of tanned and bronzed Captain Bridge, and especially when the tones of his pleasant, firm, confidence-inspiring voice fell on his ears, he longed to take the frank, genial seaman aside and tell him everything. But of what avail would be his sympathy?—and what more than that sympathy could he offer? The situation was too hopeless to leave any room for counsel from however wise a head or kind a heart.

No; on the subject of all the miserable story of what had been, of all the secret of what was and of what was soon to be, the lips of his mother and himself had far better remain closed, save to each other and to the chivalrous Sam and his nephew. Colin had taken them both to her, and had been touched by the almost reverential demeanour of Sam Sims in the presence of the stricken wife of the man to whom he had to attribute the havoc of his cherished hopes.

For Colin knew all now. In connection with his ripening friendship with these two fellow-emigrants of his, there had yet remained one more drop to be added to his overflowing cup of bitterness—and he had drunk it now.

One or two chance expressions, the more important of which he overheard by accident, had aroused in him an uneasy feeling as to the circumstances in which Sam was bearing his nephew company from one end of the

world to another—the latter's reasons for the far journey were more easily to be understood. Unable to stifle this uneasy feeling—and, in fact, preferring certainty to suspicion—he asked Sam a leading question on the subject, much to Sam's discomfiture.

'Well, Mr. Colin,' he said, 'the fack is I left hold Hingerland on accahnt of a climack—the wrong 'un. Climacks of the wrong kind will 'appen, yer know, do wot yer will. The only thing for a cove to do when he's throwed dahn is to git hup again,' he went on with an air of profound philosophy. 'I was throwed dahn violent, and was a-kickin' free when my levvy he sat on my 'ead, in a manner o' speakin', and kep' me quiet, and he likewise, in a manner o' speakin', un'itched the traces. Bein' dahn, wot did I do? Why, sir, I got hup, and bein' sort o' dazed-like, and 'im bein' ordered abroad on accahnt of 'is 'ealth, wot does I do next but take the bit between my lips and bolt along of 'im, the old woman and the kids to come on afterwards, as you know all abaht.'

So far from allaying his suspicions, such a rigmarole as this could only confirm them. Having once broached the subject he meant to get to the bottom of it.

'Sam,' he said slowly, 'what threw you down? I couldn't help catching something that Dick said to you the other day about the loss of your money—

the hard savings of years How did the loss come about?'

There was no mistaking Colin's expression. Whenever his mouth was set as it was now his mind was made up. Sam looked round helplessly for a way of escape. There was none till he had spoken. He gave another look at his questioner's face—there was no sign of relenting there.

'Don't ask me, sir—don't ask me. It ain't right for yer to know, sir—it ain't indeed, and don't tell that there good mother o' yours, it ain't no more 'er fault or doin' than yours,'—with which inconsistent speech Sam bolted.

Colin did tell his mother, because he wanted her sanction to his determination that if possible the relations between the two strangely assorted couples should not cease with their severance at Hobart Town. It might be that he could in some sort make amends—it might be that the influences that would be set to work to forward his own fortunes might be made available to forward also the fortunes of Sam and Dick, especially if they could be induced to end their voyage at the Tasmanian port.

The more he saw of Dick the better he liked him too. Already the young teacher's health had so improved that he was less prostrated by the heat than were some

on board. Warmed by the sun, the air was salted by the sea, and the salt was as the savour of life in his nostrils.

Blue skies continued to shine above sapphire seas as the *Iron Duke* ploughed her way through the deep. The short interval—respite it could not be called—between that never-to-be-forgotten revelation in Girdlestone's cabin and her arrival at Port Louis, Mauritius, was hourly running out.

The time was at hand.

'We shall sight the Island, ladies and gentlemen, at dawn. Those of you who want to catch the first sight of it will have to be on the look-out early.'

Captain Bridge's announcement at dessert created a little pleasurable excitement. While friends were making appointments to rise early and meet each other on deck, Colin rose quietly from the table (his mother was never there now) and left the saloon.

The fingers of sleep never touched his eyes all that night. He was on deck before the watch was changed. The captain was on the bridge as the sun rose, and he joined him there. Amongst the few other favoured ones who presently made their way there also were Dr Hamilton and Mr Abel Girdlestone, who still retained his clerical disguise.

The excitement of sighting the land was followed by

the excitement caused by the behaviour of a small craft under steam in the offing. Almost as soon as she was made out it was evident that the small stranger—signals flying—was steering a course for the big ship.

The detective in particular watched every movement of the former with undisguised interest, amounting to positive anxiety.

The distance between the two craft lessened every minute.

‘She’s a launch, and a smart one,’ said Captain Bridge, dropping his glass. ‘But I can’t fathom what she’s up to.’

He raised his glass again. He could make out now the flag trailing over her stern-rail. A hasty exclamation escaped him—and a second as the launch hoisted a fresh signal, in compliance with which he instantly touched the button that telegraphed the order to the engine-room, to slacken speed.

‘What’s the matter, captain? What is she?’

‘The matter is that I’ve got to heave-to for the men on that launch to board me. She’s a police boat.’

‘A police boat!’

‘Yes,’ repeated Captain Bridge.

‘Then the game’s up,’ said a voice in his rear.
‘You’ll find me in my cabin’

CHAPTER XII

THE ARREST OF GREGORY PURDYKE

STARTLED eyes sought the speaker and followed his retreating form as he hurriedly descended. Startled voices were quelled by the captain's crisp though courteous order—'Gentlemen, you will be good enough to leave the bridge.'

The engines of the *Iron Duke* were almost motionless; the launch was getting alongside.

Overside went the gangway—up it climbed nimbly an officer in police uniform and a second man in civilian attire. The pair at once mounted the bridge, where Captain Bridge had been joined by Mr. Frost, his first officer.

The police officers saluted the ship's officers respectfully.

'This ship is the *Iron Duke*. You are its captain, sir?' said the one in uniform.

'I am,' replied Harry Bridge.

'Then I have to inform you, sir, that we hold a warrant for the arrest of one Gregory Purdyke, whom

we have reason to believe may be amongst your passengers.

'I carry no passenger owning to the name,' said Captain Bridge.

'That may well be,' said the officer with a smile. 'It is possible we are mistaken as to the ship by which our man sailed, which is why we have been watching sufficiently far at sea to intercept ships that might not be calling at the Island, but fortunately we are in no doubt as to his *alias*. It is that of the Reverend Simeon Felton'

Now Captain Bridge understood that startling exclamation, 'The game's up!'

'Then there will be no need for me to parade my passengers or crew. A saloon passenger calling himself by that name is on board,' he said

'He joined at Plymouth?'

'Yes. Your warrant, please.'

The man in plain clothes stepped forward and held out a document for the captain's inspection

'You came out for him, I see'

'Yes—from London direct, ahead of telegraphic details we're now in possession of.'

'All is correct, gentlemen. And unless you're mistaken in your man I congratulate you on your capture. Are you able to identify Purdyke?' he

asked the plain clothes man, returning him the warrant

‘In any disguise.’

‘Then will you both follow me, please? The rest is easy. I suppose you will remain on board with your prisoner till I reach port?’

‘No, we’ll take him off in our own boat. There’s a good deal of excitement ashore about the expected capture, and we can manage the job more quietly by slipping in with our little craft.’

Bridge at once led the way to Felton’s cabin, where the officer who had the warrant instantly identified him through the disguise of his clerical garb and whitened hair and shaven face and art-imprinted wrinkles. Indeed, his prisoner made no sort of attempt at denial or further concealment.

‘The game’s up!’ he had said.

The uniformed officer produced a pair of handcuffs.

‘Is that necessary?’ asked Purdyke, with a cynical smile.

‘Perhaps not, but—er—as a precaution, you know. Thank you’—and the bracelets were fastened on the outstretched wrists. ‘It is my duty to warn you that anything you may say may be used hereafter in evidence against you at your trial.’

'All his baggage, please—' said the jubilant functionary in mufti to the captain.

'Is here, so far as I know.'

'Captain Bridge is perfectly correct. When I knew the game was up—as I did the instant I perceived the striking flag your boat carries, gentlemen—I prepared for the inevitable. My traps are ready packed'—and Purdyke pointed to an orderly array of luggage ranged along one side of the cabin. 'I am really infinitely obliged to you, Captain Bridge, for your successful ~~endeavour~~ to make my trip on your very comfortable ship a pleasant one. It is really a pity that it should have so unpleasant an ending, as well as a premature one. I am grieved, but it really isn't my fault, you know. You must blame these "active and intelligent" agents of the law. I feel so pained that I shall not be able to conduct any more Sunday services for you.'

Honest Captain Bridge turned away

'I'll send a couple of hands to help you with his traps,' he said, and left the cabin in disgust, sending down Mr Frost to take his place.

Two hands speedily made their appearance, and the officer in uniform accompanied them as they bore away all the prisoner's luggage and lowered it into the launch alongside, where a third policeman received it. Returning to the cabin—

'We are quite ready, I think?'

'Quite,' said his comrade.

They placed themselves on each side of their prisoner, and were on the point of going above, when Colin and Sam Sims burst into the cabin.

Colin's lips were hot with the excited questions that poured from them, addressed indiscriminately to captors and captive.

Could the news be true? Was this man Gregory Purdyke? What did it all mean? How did he explain having in his possession——

But the policeman pulled him up sharp. They would allow no questions to be put by any unauthorised person to their prisoner. If he liked to make any statement he might do so at his own risk and inside of two minutes.

'Casselden,' said Purdyke, more seriously than he had spoken since his arrest, 'what you want to know I'll tell you—or as much of it as I think proper. I am Mr. Gregory Purdyke.'

'Right I was!' shouted Sam. 'Ere's a rummy climack! I wonder nahw how he smoothed dahn my first suspicions so nicely. Somethink 'as come of 'em, after all.'

'Quite so. Time being so short, I shall be able to say the more the less I am interrupted. You and your

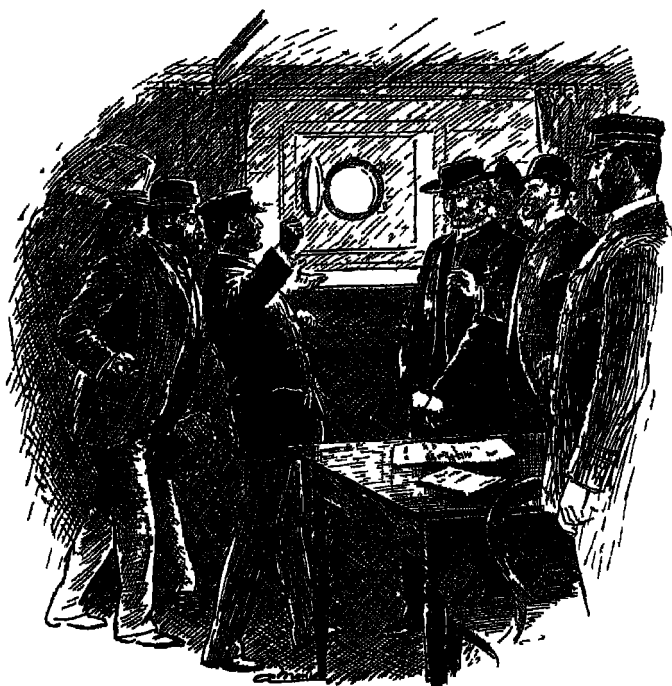
excellent mother naturally want to know, Colin,' went on Purdyke placidly, 'all I can tell you about your father. I can tell you nothing except that what I did tell you was a little exercise of my imagination. There was not any truth in it at all.

'It really seems a pity—doesn't it?—that my pains to throw you off the scent should have been wasted after all. You see, I perceived that you had vague suspicions that there was something fishy about me, and as for my old friend cabby here, I knew exactly what his definite suspicions were when he changed countenance so remarkably on getting a first look at me, and I took it for granted that he would communicate his suspicions to you, as I used to see you a good deal together. I shouldn't have been afraid of you by yourself, because I remembered that neither you nor your mother had ever met me in my proper person. There is no doubt whatever in my own mind, Colin, but that your father was drowned according to your own account, which, you know, appeared in the papers. It was really the very best thing that could have happened to him.'

Colin's hand was raised to strike. In another second a blow would have fallen full upon the smiling face so close to his clenched fist. But his eyes caught the glitter of the handcuffs, and his fist dropped to his side. Not

under any provocation could he strike a defenceless man

'There is some mystery in all this!' he cried 'Mr



FAGIN'S HAND WAS RAISED TO STRIKE

Frost, where is Captain Bridge? How came you'—to the prisoner—'to be in possession of the papers you showed me? How came you——'

'Gi' me my keb and two 'orses!' roared Sam. 'Let

me git at 'im, and I'll land him a climack on the nose'

'Stand aside, young gentleman, please'—'Back with you, my man'—and the officers pushed smartly past and bounded up the stairs, their prisoner between them. The three gained the launch alongside, dropping aboard her almost at the same moment. Her nose lay straight for the distant land.

'Cast off!' shouted one of them.

With a quick look downward into the little engine-room, he cried—

'Full speed ahead!'

Again the telegraph clicked in the engine-room of the *Iron Duke*, the great screw churned the water, the smoke puffed from her funnels, and she forged, at first slowly, on her way.

The launch raced on in advance, maintaining such a rate of speed that she seemed soon no bigger than a speck in the distance.

The news had soon spread all over the ship, quietly as the police had got away with their prize. The laggards came out of their berths—excited passengers gathered round Captain Bridge and pestered him with eager questions. On every hand voices were heard expressing the gratification of the speakers that the

swindling bank director had been so neatly laid by the heels; and almost every one joined in expressing the hope that his accomplice would soon join him in captivity.

When the ladies also emerged from their retirement, the clatter of tongues was louder than ever. The disappearance by and by of the few passengers who would reach their destination when they reached Mauritius made no sensible difference in the volume of talk, and caused no sensible diminution of the prevailing hubbub.

It was astonishing what a lot of his fellow-voyagers had suspected the Rev. Simeon Felton all along. Such a lot of them had been clever enough to notice all sorts of suspicious things about him of which they had said nothing at the time, but of which they could not say enough now.

If only the excited passengers of the *Iron Duke* could have known what a startling surprise awaited them at Port Louis, now close at hand !

CHAPTER XIII

TRICKED

‘BOAT coming alongside, sir.’
‘What boat?’

‘The harbour-master’s gig, sir.’

‘What’s up now, I wonder?’ said Captain Bridge—still below—when, a minute later, it was reported to him that the harbour-master himself was coming aboard.

He soon knew. After a friendly but hurried greeting—they had met before—the latter informed him that by the governor’s orders the *Iron Duke* was to enter the D dock, and on no account to get berthed in any other.

The spacious harbour of Port Louis contains several docks, and it was a matter of no moment to Captain Bridge which one of them his vessel was directed to, but he was at no pains to conceal his surprise at the manner if not the matter of the harbour-master’s communication.

‘By the governor’s orders? What has the berthing

of my ship to do with the governor?' he asked bluntly. 'This is not by any means my first visit here, Mr Orpitt, as you know; but I've not had such an experience before, either here or anywhere else. She's not flying the Yellow Jack that his Excellency need interfere with her movements. What does it mean?'

'I think I'd better tell you the further orders under which I am acting before satisfying your natural curiosity—so far as I am able to do so at all.'

'Further orders?'

'Yes. You are to be prepared to parade your passengers and all hands before one of either is allowed to land. Precautions have been taken to prevent any one on shore from coming aboard except the police. The gates of the D dock are closed to exclude the public.'

'Those are your instructions—they end there?'

'Yes, captain.'

'Now, then, what is the reason for them?'

'All I can tell you is that your ship is to be searched for a murderer who is suspected to be on board.'

'Am I sailing a convict ship?' cried Bridge. 'A murderer!'

'Yes. The mail is due to-morrow, and doubtless when it arrives we shall all learn particulars. All I know at present is, that a cipher despatch was tele-

graphed to the authorities here from the police authorities in London, and that in consequence of the information or suspicion that a badly-wanted criminal is on board, the *Iron Duke's* arrival has been anxiously looked for. Only as much as I have told you has leaked out, but——'

'She's entering port, sir'

'Then it's my duty to act as your pilot into the specified dock, captain,' said Mr Orpitt as they rose to go on deck.

With the exception of two trading schooners discharging rice and grain, and a barque taking in rum and sugar, the D dock was clear of other shipping. A small group of officials and a smaller group of dock hands stood on the quayside waiting for the big steamer. She was barely alongside before a shore gangway was run up. Two members of the former group instantly boarded her, and made their way to Captain Bridge.

Introducing themselves without any waste of words, they made the communication for which Mr. Orpitt had prepared him, but with an astounding addition for which he was indeed unprepared.

'The man we now want for murder has been wanted, with another, for weeks on another charge. In fact, the capital charge has arisen from the original one,

Our information is that he was tracked on his way to Plymouth, and murdered the officer who effected his arrest in the train. His name is Gregory Purdyke—*alias* Felton’

‘Gregory Purdyke! Why, what are you thinking of? What are you talking about? What on earth are you doing? He was taken from my ship by your own boat hours ago.’

‘What are *you* talking about, sir?’ was the angry retort. ‘You’ll find it no light matter if you try to put any impediment in our way in the execution of our duty—even by only unnecessary questions. Be good enough to parade your crew and request your male passengers to assemble for our inspection—*instantly*, sir. We have shown you our authority——’

‘So did the officers who boarded me at dawn from your launch’

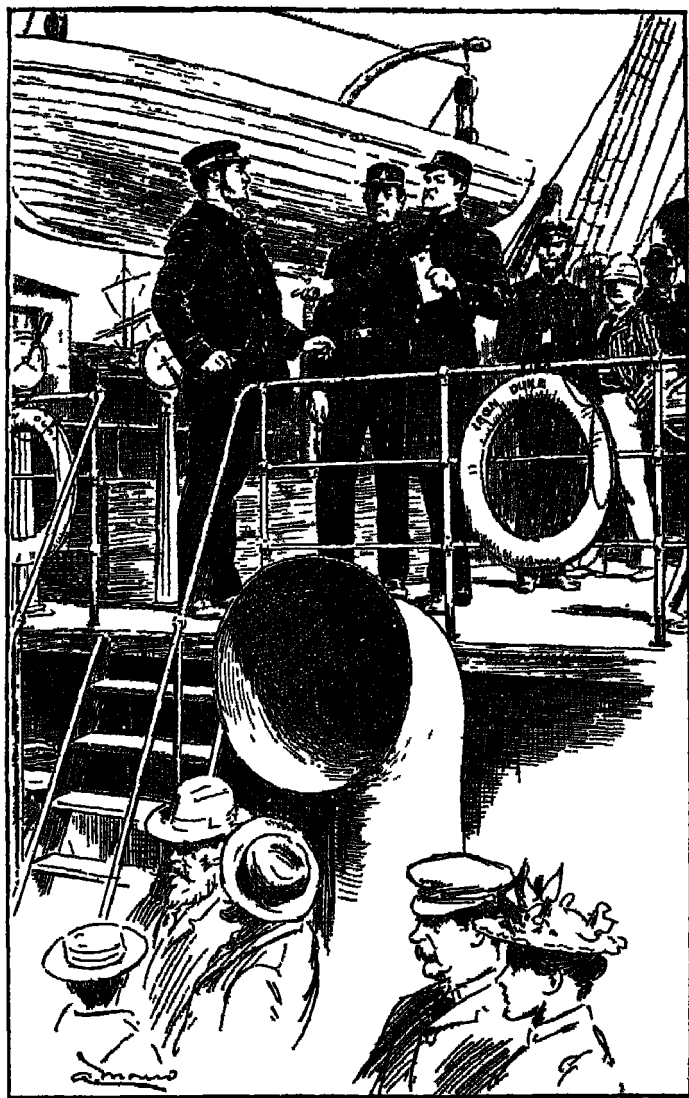
‘Our launch!’

‘Yes, and took away the man you want again. You can’t have him twice over.’

‘What do you mean?’ demanded the inspector

‘Who boarded you?’ cried his lieutenant

There was no mistaking, there could be no possible doubt of the genuineness of the blank astonishment on the countenances of the two officials. They regarded each other and the face of the perplexed seaman with



'WE HAVE SHOWN YOU OUR AUTHORITY.'

looks of incredulous amazement. A sudden idea struck the senior of them.

'It is as easy to understand,' he exclaimed, 'that this Gregory Purdyke would offer you a bribe to assist in or connive at his escape, as it is hard to believe that a man in your position would be so base, as well as so foolish, as to accept it. But if——'

'Don't you dare to address such language to me, sir, or you will have very quick reason to regret it,' said Bridge furiously.

'Don't *you* dare to threaten the agents of the law.'

'I dare to do a good deal more than threaten any man who impugns my honour. That can be no part of your duty, gentlemen.'

The latter sentence was uttered after a slight pause and more calmly, receiving instantly the conciliatory response—

'It is not, captain. I withdraw the remark I made, and regret having made it.'

'Thank you. And now let me repeat what provoked it. As I have told you——'

'I beg your pardon, captain, but our colloquy has attracted attention—may I propose that we go into this extraordinary statement of yours where we shall not incur the danger of being overheard?'

'Certainly; come into my cabin.'

As the three descended, Bridge turned to his visitors.

'I observe that you have posted your men at the foot of the gangway to guard against any one's leaving the ship—Mr. Frost!'

'Yes, sir'—and the mate slipped up to him.

'You will see that not a soul goes down that gangway, or leaves the ship by any other means, till I have finished my business with these gentlemen, and give the word.'

With the absolute and convincing candour of a man who had nothing to conceal, Captain Bridge repeated in detail, in the privacy of his own cabin, the brief story of the arrest on board his ship, and the almost immediate taking away, of Gregory Purdyke that morning.

The incredulity that had at first made itself so conspicuous in the looks and uttered expressions of the staggered officials gave place to consternation and bitter chagrin.

'Captain Bridge,' said the officer with whom he had had the recent little passage of wordy arms, 'though we must hold you blameless of personal culpability, you have been imposed on, sir—imposed on by, I will admit, the cleverest, as well as the most daring, dodge I have ever heard of during a whole lifetime in the force. You have been victimised into lending a hand

to a successful plot—successful so far—for the escape of this fellow and the defeat of justice. I can positively aver that the boat which hailed you was sailing under false colours; that the men who boarded you were not police officers from this port or island, that——’

‘But the uniforms?’

‘Must have been obtained fraudulently, and worn fraudulently. I say *must* have been, sir.’

‘But their papers? I held the warrant itself in my own hands, as well as official letters, which proved the *bona-fides* of the man who had come over from England with it.’

The inspector gazed from Bridge to his comrade, and from his comrade back to Bridge, in hopeless bewilderment.

‘By Jove!’ exclaimed his companion, who had hitherto scarcely spoken at all, ‘I believe I can see how the trick was done.’ Of course, the capture was effected very easily—the man gave no trouble?’

‘He admitted his identity before it was challenged.’

‘Quite so. I do see through the whole thing. This is how the thing was worked—warrant, papers and all.’

Before he could commence to expound the theory he had formed, he was interrupted by the entrance of the second mate. Addressing the captain—

'Young Mr. Casselden wishes to know, sir, if you will see him at once, in the presence of these gentlemen. He says he has something to communicate with reference to the arrest this morning.'

'Casselden?' said the two genuine police-officers together.

'Yes,' nodded Bridge; 'and "yes" to the supposition in your minds. The young gentleman who has sent this message is the son of the Casselden who was wanted as Purdyke's accomplice in the bank fraud—though what he can have to say to me I have no idea. Send him to us.'

'Yes, sir'—and the second mate's disappearance was followed immediately by Colin's appearance. With Colin entered Sam Sims, for bringing whom with him the former apologised.

'But you will soon see, Captain Bridge, that he is mixed up with what I have to say. I am afraid it will only add to the mystery; but when I heard what is reported to have been the object of these gentlemen in coming on board, I felt that what I have to say I ought to say.'

'Say it, my lad.'

All three listened, at first attentively and patiently, as Colin narrated what had happened at the Sunday afternoon interview he and Sam had had with 'Abel

Girdlestone': but as it became evident that his revelation would not throw any light on the facts of Purdyke's accomplished 'capture'—that is to say, on his effected escape—the inspector began to fidget. As Colin finished, however, he turned to his comrade and said quickly—

'I follow your idea now, and all that this young gentleman has told us bears it out. Captain, after what we have heard there can be no doubt that it's our man who has got away. But it is clear, from your description of the launch his confederates boarded you from, that she is not capable of making anything like a long voyage. She has only a start of hours, after all, and we'll scour the seas all round the Island for her. I can't see where she can have made for but Bourbon, where French ships occasionally call. They may be hoping to get a passage from there under the French flag before they can be caught up. When do you leave Port Louis?'

'All being well, to-morrow.'

'After the arrival of the mail?'

'I shall wait for the mail.'

'Then I hope you will learn before you sail that your clever fugitive-passenger has been tripped up; and, at all events, you will be interested to be informed of the fuller information the mail will bring

us of this last crime with which he is charged. I must ask you to accompany us now to make a sworn declaration of your statement to us.'

'Certainly,' said Captain Bridge, rising. 'I'm ready. You have no objection to raise against my giving instructions that such of my passengers as desire to land, besides those who are leaving the ship here, may go ashore?'

'None whatever.'

CHAPTER XIV

MURDER !

THE police acted with all possible promptitude. The idea being entertained that the bogus police launch had put out to sea with the intention of cruising (while her provisions lasted) before shaping her course, three boats which were found to be available were got ready with all speed and started to scour the neighbouring waters, each with a posse of police on board, their orders being, if they caught sight of the launch, to board her if they could and follow her if they couldn't.

One of the three boats headed straight away sou'-east for the Isle of Bourbon in pursuance of the sub-inspector's idea, another took the eastward sea and the third—a private sailing yacht which had been requisitioned for the chase—steered westward.

Not one of them had returned by nightfall. Noon of the next day brought home the tug from the east. She had nothing to report—she had seen no signs of the runaway launch. A couple of hours after the

yacht was seen making the port: she had been equally unsuccessful.

The steam pinnace had not yet returned from Bourbon. all hopes now centred on her. If she also came back with nothing to report, the fact must be faced that the launch had made good her escape from all present pursuit.

The sensation of the day was the arrival of the English mail. There was even more than the usual rush for the newspapers. None were addressed to Colin, but it was not long before he obtained possession of one, with which he hastened to his waiting mother. Suppressing a number of sensational paragraphs, the following was the account it contained of the crime for which Purdyke was now wanted on the capital charge—

‘We yesterday published a brief account from our Exeter correspondent of the recovery of the body of a well-dressed man from one of the little-frequented backwaters of the recently flooded river Exe on the previous evening. The case was at first supposed to be one of suicide by drowning. An examination of the body, however, revealed the wound of a small but deep stab under the left armpit, which the doctor who was summoned pronounced at once to be the cause of death, the heart having been penetrated. He unhesitatingly condemned the hypothesis that the wound could have been self-inflicted, and declared the case *primâ facie* to be one of murder. He gave it as his opinion that the body had been immersed for about a fortnight. . . .

'The fact that both gold and silver coins, as well as a gold watch, chain, and scarf-pin, were found on the body, points to another motive for the crime than robbery. In the absence of any papers in the pockets of the murdered man's clothing, the only clue to his identity was the fact that his linen was marked with the initials "A. G."; but yesterday the corpse was recognised by a local policeman as that of Mr. Abel Girdlestone, a missing detective from New Scotland Yard.

'A telegram was at once sent to the headquarters of the Criminal Investigation Department in London, and two private detectives reached Exeter by the afternoon express from town. They immediately confirmed the constable's identification. . . . It appears that the murdered man had for weeks past been engaged in endeavouring to trace the missing Industrial Bank director, Gregory Purdyke. In fact, he held warrants for the arrest of both Purdyke and Casselden, though the drowning of the latter in his endeavour to escape across the Channel had long ended the hope of introducing him to the Old Bailey. . . .

'The authorities are at present reticent, but it is said to be known at headquarters that on the afternoon of the 13th inst. Girdlestone booked from Paddington to Plymouth, with the express purpose of travelling in the company of a man whom he suspected to be no other than Gregory Purdyke, who was known to have been hiding in London. . . .

'A porter has been interviewed at the Plymouth terminus who states that he was on duty at the time of the arrival of the express on the night of the 13th. A passenger hailed him from a first-class carriage, and gave him orders to superintend the removal of a number of registered trunks and boxes, which were labelled in the name of the Rev. Simeon Felton, for the ss. *Iron Duke*.

'The fingers of this passenger's right hand were bound round by a silk handkerchief, and he remarked, as he lifted his own valise in his left hand, that in cutting the leaves of a magazine on the journey with a sharp pocket-knife, it had slipped and gashed his flesh.

'In consequence of this statement the porter took little heed of some bloodstains which he subsequently observed on the cushions and floor of the compartment from which the passenger had alighted. He describes "Felton" as a powerful-looking elderly man in clerical get-up, wearing a loosely-hanging but closely-buttoned cloak or cape over his other clothes.

'He left the station-yard on foot, still carrying his valise, but his trunks and boxes were taken charge of by the shipping agents of the steamer *Iron Duke*, who put them on board upon that vessel's arrival on the 17th instant. It has been ascertained that from the night of the 13th until the morning of the 17th a person answering to the description of "Felton," though not to the name, stayed at a small private boarding-house near the Millbay Dock. . . .

'The theory of the police, though it leaves out of account much that seems inexplicable, is intelligible enough so far as it goes, and they have not allowed the grass to grow under their feet in acting upon it. They are convinced (and it must be assumed that they have good grounds for their belief) that "the Reverend Simeon Felton" is the *alias* under which Gregory Purdyke, the man the unfortunate officer was running down, was travelling; that the latter revealed himself to his fellow-passenger in the execution of his duty, and was stabbed by his prisoner to escape arrest, his body being flung into the river by his murderer as the train crossed it in the gloom of the evening. It is admitted that great muscular exertion would be required to accomplish this, but in view of the suspect's superior physique, the gruesome task would not be an impossible one. . . .

'It is stated that Girdlestone, in whom in other respects the greatest confidence was reposed, was fearless almost to a fault, and just the man to attempt a single-handed capture "for preference." It appears that he had made a number of arrests unaided, in circumstances which would have justified him in delaying until assistance was available. In fact, he is said to have plumed himself on his self-dependence. . . .

'The first point at which it will now be possible to effect the arrest

of Gregory Purdyke, *alias* Simeon Felton, is Port Louis, Mauritius, the first place of call of the *Iron Duke* (bound for Hobart Town and Dunedin) after leaving Suez. Telegraphic instructions have been despatched to the authorities at Port Louis, who will be on the look-out for the ship's pending arrival. . . .

'A startling rumour was current in city circles yesterday afternoon to the effect that Purdyke's complicity in other commercial frauds has been discovered, and that there is reason to believe that his aiders and abettors in these landed at Mauritius from a German vessel some time last month. It was even asserted that these very men are "wanted" also on a charge of being mixed up with the Industrial Bank affair itself.'

'Mother,' cried Colin, 'it is clear at last how Purdyke was able to palm himself off upon Sims and me as his own victim. The identification of the murdered man was delayed by "the absence of any papers," because those papers—warrants and all—had been stolen by his murderer. And, mother,' he went on excitedly, 'I begin to see how he schemed, and managed to get carried through, his bogus arrest by bogus policemen from a bogus police boat, for that, we all know, is what really took place yesterday morning.'

'He must have had confederates here—here, on this island—doubtless the very men referred to in this last sentence, who may have been waiting to join him when the ship arrived here. And to these confederates he would have had time to write by the mail steamer ahead of the *Iron Duke*, telling them what to do.'

He concocted the plot, and they carried it out. He sent them the warrant for his own arrest, and the other papers they showed the captain.'

Mrs Casselden was about to speak, when a message was brought to Colin that the captain wished to see him.

Captain Bridge received his young passenger very kindly.

'This will interest you,' he said gravely, holding his finger on a marked passage of the newspaper he held towards him

Colin glanced at it

'I've read it already, captain. Has it struck you that it explains what puzzled me so yesterday—and much more?'

'Yes, but the first man to tumble to what the paper now makes pretty plain was one of the police officers—the genuine ones—before all this further information was known.'

'What do you think, sir, of the chance of the police overhauling the launch?'

'They started with three chances—two are gone. Their third chance is in their third boat. We shall know when—well, Mr. Frost?'

'The police pinnace returning from Bourbon is in sight, sir'

CHAPTER XV

SMITH, JONES, BROWN, AND ROBINSON

AS soon as the launch got away from the towering side of the *Iron Duke*, 'arrested' and arresters' scrambled down below. Save for the space occupied by her engine, the launch was 'all cabin' below her trim white deck.

Purdyke held out his fettered hands: the man who had fastened the handcuffs on them had the manacles off in a trice.

With a look towards the closed door and up towards the open skylight, 'Is it safe to speak?' were Purdyke's first words. 'Who's aboard, Greyling?'

'Nobody of that name—or of the other name either. Don't let one or the other pass your lips,' answered the man addressed as Greyling, slipping the handcuffs back into his pocket. 'I'm Jones; here'—pointing to the other two men—'are Brown and Robinson. You're Smith. The right name of any one of the four of us would be enough to give the lot of us away, and, the sooner we get the hang of the new false ones on our lips the better.'

'Then is there any one on board not in the know? Who is aboard besides ourselves, Gr——Jones?'

'A mad Chinaman and a Malagash. We were obliged to bring them to manage the boat. You gave us precious little time to work the fake.'

'I gave you all I could—and you've succeeded.'

'Yes, so far: but only because everything worked into our hands. I got your letter in the nick of time, for this boat—she's the *Prairie Flower*, unless we give her an *alias* as well—was advertised for sale the same morning. The price the fellow asked for her was such an absurd one, beauty as she is——'

'But—get on with your story faster—you paid it, of course. We couldn't afford to bargain. You paid the price?'

'No, I didn't. I played a smarter game than that. In fact, I couldn't have paid the sum asked without trying to pass one of the dangerous bits of big paper. You've brought——?'—with a glance at the property transferred to the launch from the *Iron Duke* with the 'prisoner.'

'Yes, yes. Get on faster.'

'Well, as I couldn't have paid if I would, and wouldn't have paid if I could, I stipulated for a free trial.'

'Ha! ha! Good. And it came off?'

'As right as clockwork. The launch was put at our disposal, and two hands were put under our orders.'

'Two of the boat's own hands!'

'Yes; and now there's going to be trouble with them—but I'll come to that directly. We only got out yesterday. It took me all the time to get hold of correct uniforms and flags, and so on; in fact, we had to make the flags. You may thank your stars that we hadn't run through *all* our stock of ready money and that we had *vous* enough to do all we've done for you. We've saved you—so far.'

'And yourselves—and yourselves. Don't forget that. You wouldn't have been safe many days longer.'

'Now, look here—Smith. We'll leave Brown, Robinson, and Jones out of it, please. All this has been worked and risked for Smith. Brown, Jones, and Robinson had—and have, if you like—only a few years' liberty at stake. Smith had his head in a halter until we took it out—and his neck isn't far away from the halter now.'

'The halter! My neck. Then it's known—the news has come on?'

'Of course it has. You didn't miscalculate—our sham arrest has saved you from an unpleasantly real one; and for the murder, too—not the other jobs.'

There was an unmistakable ring of sincerity in the voice of 'Jones' as he added—

'And while you've got a stiver left we don't intend to forget it;' as there was also in the duet of 'Brown' and 'Robinson'—

'No! that we don't.'

In altered, lower voices the three asked, almost in one breath, as though animated at the same moment by the same instinct of half-morbid but wholly real curiosity, each bringing his face closer to the shrinking face of Gregory Purdyke—

'How was it? How did you do it?'

Gregory Purdyke looked round him with a frightened, wandering gaze before he answered, as though he feared that the very walls had ears. His bravado, real or assumed, had gone now. His voice fell to a low, hoarse whisper—so low that the anxious faces round him drew nearer yet. They bent over him as he sank into a chair.

'I had to do it. There was no way but—this!' He flashed for a second before the eyes of his companions the blade—thinner than the blade of a pocket-knife—of a sharp, long dagger of exquisite Oriental workmanship.

They drew back with an irrepressible shudder. Each was a swindler, a rogue, and a thief—but not one was a murderer.

Purdyke's face paled perceptibly as he noticed that simultaneous, involuntary gesture of horror, and he hurriedly returned the dagger to its hiding-place

'I *had* to do it, I tell you. He had actually arrested me—his hand was on my shoulder as I plunged it in—up to the hilt. He didn't struggle—he hadn't time—and there was very little blood. I knew how to staunch it. We were running over a bridge across a river. I—I threw him out. I—I heard the splash below. Most of the blood that did flow was on my coat—and there was some on my hands. It got there when I took his papers. I wiped it off, and dried the other, and then I opened my valise and put on a cloak, and covered it all up.

'I had Satan's own good luck, for I got out of the station without a suspicion being raised and the floods carried it—the—the body—away. I had an awful time waiting for the ship at Plymouth. I lay low, but every moment I expected to hear that—it—had been found. Of course, I took another name, but I couldn't alter the name on the luggage, and had to go on board in the name in which my passage had been taken. I wrote to you at once

'Everything favoured me, for the mail started before the *Iron Duke* arrived. I made sure she would be boarded at Suez—for me, but she wasn't.

The body couldn't have been found till the floods went down.'

'Well, it's been found now, right enough. Sufficient information reached the Island more than a week ago to make that certain. It's no use to shudder. You began your tale in the middle—go back to where we all parted company in Hamburg.'

The conversation that followed referred to a partnership in crime that had commenced between them four months ago. In this nefarious partnership they had all been associated with a number of City frauds. In due time discovery became imminent; but they waited in fear and trembling till the Satanic good fortune of which he had just been boasting gave Purdyke the chance of his grand *coup* at the Industrial.

His plans for that crowning iniquity were laid with nothing short of genius. Greyling—or Jones, as we will call him—was sent to Southampton the day before its actual perpetration, and from Southampton wrote and posted him the letter which was found in the cab that drove him to Waterloo. It was left there in order that it might be found. The name of the *Cameroon* was not pitched on accidentally, but used designedly, the writer of the sham message having ascertained that there was a ship of that name then in port, outward bound the next day.

That drive to Waterloo was another link in the false chain of evidence, forged for the purpose of leading pursuit on the wrong track

From Waterloo he doubled back to the City, and with Jones and Robinson (it would serve no present object to call any of the three by his true name), in the character of two of the Industrial clerks, proceeded boldly to the Bank of England, where he drew out the large sum of money that was awaiting the call of the Industrial.

As much as it was practicable to take in gold was so taken, and put into a four-wheeled cab, on the box-seat of which sat Brown, in the character of a licensed driver. The rest was in notes

The cab was driven to a quiet house in a respectable suburb, which had been hired to serve as a safe hiding-place. Here the gold was left, the notes were divided, and the house was locked up. The daring four separated, each leaving the same afternoon for the Continent by a different route, to meet subsequently, by arrangement, at Hamburg. Each had succeeded in changing some of his notes, but not one had time to change his entire share before it was too dangerous to keep the game on.

Purdyke undertook the desperate mission of returning to London (of course in disguise) to recover possession

of the gold that had been purposely left behind—for this had been his own idea. He had argued that on the whole it involved less risk than taking it with them on their 'preliminary canter' on the Continent, their ultimate destination being the other end of the world.

By the time they were ready for that other and longer journey, 'the police will be busier looking for us on the Continent than in London,' he had insisted. His three confederates took passage for Mauritius (where he was to join them) in a ship sailing thither from Hamburg. Purdyke made good his return to England, and, as we know, his second escape from it.

And now—talking of some of these incidents of their association and their common crimes—common save for that one blacker crime that had stained the hands of the ringleader with blood—the four were together once more.

And but for the few thousands they had spent, the spoils of the great Bank robbery were in the cabin of the *Prairie Flower* with them—in gold—so carefully distributed in trunks and boxes that the weight of each was not too great—in foreign paper, which could be negotiated by and by—and in the Bank of England notes they had not succeeded in changing.

The thieves and their plunder—what a haul for the police if only they could run her down and get on board the little *Prairie Flower* !

CHAPTER XVI

WHY CHANG-TO PORTED HIS HELM

IT was not long before all other subjects were abandoned in order that the great question of the moment might be discussed and decided.

That question was 'Whither away'

They had only a safe start of the interval between their leaving the *Iron Duke* and her arrival at Port Louis, for pursuit was certain to follow fast on the heels of the inevitable discovery of their audacious, but so far successful, plot for the rescue of one of their number from the hands of the hangman

The motives of Jones, Brown, and Robinson for involving themselves in the perils of that plot are easy to understand. In the first place, they knew that Mauritius would soon be too hot to hold them, and that they would have to get away somewhere somehow, and more powerful still was the reflection that in saving Purdyke was their only chance of saving their shares of the booty he was bringing with him.

Gregory Purdyke produced a small chart and pinned it to the table.

'Now then, where are we to steer for? It'll be a nice calculation of odds and risks anyway. To begin with: how long have you provisioned the launch for?'

'I couldn't do more without arousing suspicion—we can hold out for a week,' replied Jones.

'Good. What's her speed?'

'Fast—she's a regular torpedo-boat. She can do up to seventeen miles an hour easily, eighteen safely, nineteen possibly. I don't know how much coal she burns a day, but her bunkers are full.'

'Good again. Our choice is limited, but we must make it at once. Look here at the chart—we might make for some of the islands—say the Seychelles—but not one of them would be safe.'

'It seems to me we have two alternatives, and two only,' said Jones.

'What's the first?'

'To run the launch clear of Mauritius and take her east or south-east till we get into the track of ships.'

'For one of them to pick us up?'

'Yes. We should have to make out that we were a pleasure party driven out to sea.'

'And allow her to carry us to whatever port she was making for. Why, man alive, she might be homeward

bound! We couldn't pick and choose our ship—if we could, it would be a different thing. We should have to be saved by the first we ran across. Your first plan would never do'

'Certainly not,' agreed Brown and Robinson emphatically.

'I didn't think it would,' said Jones, somewhat surlily.

'Then why waste time in talking about it?' remonstrated Purdyke angrily 'Out with your second plan: ten to one it's the same as mine.'

'Well, what is yours, then?'

'Madagascar.'

Jones nodded.

'Madagascar'' echoed the two others

'Yes,' said Purdyke firmly. 'It has everything in our favour We've got a start of any pursuit, and, given fair weather—which we've got to chance in any case—we can reach Tamatave easily, long enough before—if I'm not mistaken—any telegram could reach there from Mauritius to interfere with us.'

'That's right enough,' confirmed Brown, who had been a telegraph operator. 'There's no direct cable between Mauritius and Madagascar. A message would have to go from Port Louis to Zanzibar, from Zanzibar to Mozambique, and from Mozambique over French wires to Majunga, on the West Coast, from there it

would have to be carried by hand slap across the country to Tamatave.'

'Good—very good, for the French are there, and in their present state of feeling towards the English wouldn't be disposed to aid the British authorities by surrendering us, or to give them any assistance if we are traced there. And Madagascar is as unlikely a place for us to be looked for in as any we could get to. My own idea is to pass myself off as an English newspaper correspondent'

'Landed from London in a specially chartered steam launch?' put in Brown satirically

'No, sent over from Mauritius. The thing is worth thinking of for all of us. If we can get attached or attach ourselves to one of the French columns marching on Antananarivo, we shall be out of ken and beyond chase for months, and in that time the scent will be lost, and we can return to the coast and wait for a chance to get away. I've no idea of spending my life there.'

He turned to Jones and Robinson—both in uniform

'Of course you two have brought plain clothes with you'

They nodded an affirmative.

'But what about the fever?' said Robinson. 'The French are dying in the lowlands like flies.'

'We'd better die with them than—the other thing.'

'That's true enough in your case,' retorted the objector meaningly, 'but, you see, it doesn't apply in ours'

'Yes, it does. It applies near enough, anyway. Smith's right,' declared Jones, with an oath to emphasise the strength of his conviction 'I'm for Madagascar and the press! As non-combatants, we could hurry through the fever-stricken swamps into the healthy table-lands ahead of the troops, who are lumbered up with all the impedimenta of an armed march

'The natives would help Englishmen with plenty of English money. they make a big distinction between the French whites whom they hate, and the English whites whom they like. There would be no danger either from Hovas or Sakalavas. Besides, Tamatave might be a snug place to lie low in, without going up country at all. Everything that Smith has said is right. I'm with him, and we'll steer for Tamatave'

'What are we to do with the loot? How could we travel with such a weight of gold inland, and how could we leave it behind in safety?'

Smith turned on the speaker savagely.

'Brown'—he got out the (in one sense) unfamiliar name with a slight effort—'if you think that any one

of us, or the four of us put together, can hit on a plan that shall be free from difficulties any more than free from dangers, you're a fool. The difficulties must be dealt with and the dangers faced as they arise. We couldn't be in greater difficulty or in greater danger than we are now. We can only act for the best, or what seems the best, and leave contingencies. I can't form a better plan than I've proposed. Can you?'

'No,' confessed Brown, 'I can't.'

'Then it's all settled,' said Jones. 'We'll put the boat about for Tamatave.'

He bent over the chart, and touched a spot with a pencil.

'This is where we are. There's Madagascar—that's Tamatave. Now whatever a sailor would call it, we'll say the course is north-east, and the distance, roughly, about five hundred miles. The launch is a splendid sea-boat, and well fitted—we ought to be able to make the run all right, if we can quell the mutiny.'

'What mutiny?' asked Purdyke, in a voice that showed his amazement.

'The mutiny that the two hands—the Chinaman and the Malagash—are going to raise. This is the trouble I referred to. They smell a rat already—the Chinaman particularly—about this trial trip. When we order them to alter their course and steer away from Mauritius

they'll *know* that we *are* running away with her from their master, and they'll strike. They've shown signs of doing it already. If we could work the boat without them we could soon stop or prevent any fuss or bother by pitching them overboard. but we can't work her without them, so they've got to be mastered. But mind, no half measures will do for them. Come on deck, everybody, and I'll face them right-away. Wait a minute.'

But as he stooped to open a locker, Robinson divined his intention, and remarked—'Don't trouble, I have one in my pocket.' And the four at once proceeded above.

The time had slipped by. The land across their bows had taken clear outline; the smoke of the *Iron Duke* astern was only just discernible—the launch herself would not now be visible from the ship.

The Chinaman was at the helm, smiling. The Malagash—a Hova—was stoking the fire. Jones called him up.

'Chang-To!'

'Blitish subject,' murmured the little Chinaman, smiling even more blandly. Whatever happened, whatever was said, whatever done, Chang-To always smiled. Another thing he never lost an opportunity of doing was to insist on stating, however irrelevant the

statement might happen to be, that he was a British subject. What his claim was to this constantly asserted dignity nobody could ever make out

‘Ranavo’

‘I am Ranavo, and I am here,’ answered the Hova.

‘Listen, both of you. We’re not going back where we came from. We’re going to Tamatave, and you’re coming with us’

‘Not comee Tamatave,’ contradicted Chang-To smilingly. ‘You tly stealee master’s steam devl.’

‘That’s quite true, Pigtail; but if you say it again, or say again that you won’t obey our orders, we’ll kick you.’

Robinson, standing close at Jones’s elbow, raised his foot threateningly; and the almond-eyed Mongol saw the gesture.

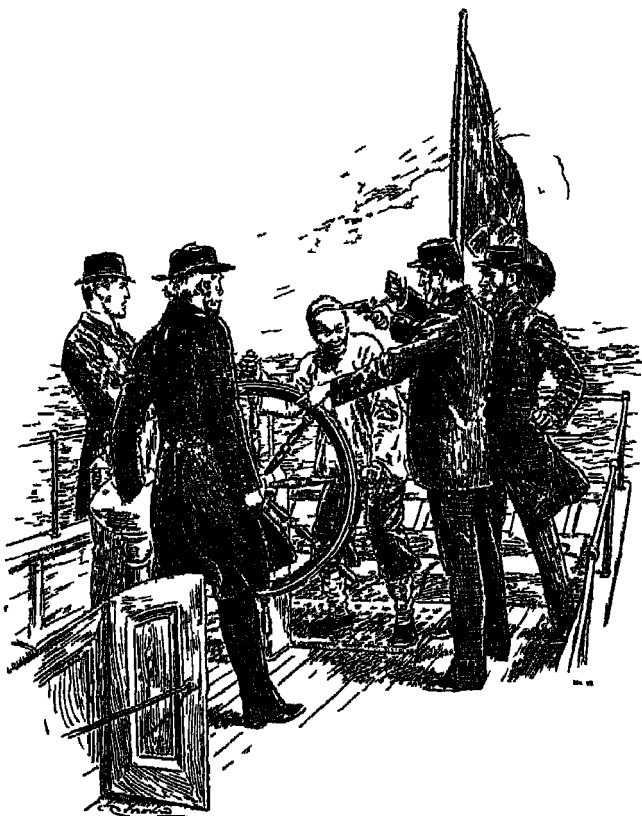
‘Blitish subject,’ he bleated; ‘Lobinson kickee Blitish subject, Blitish subject go tellee Queen—Queen come kickee Lobinson.’

‘If kicks won’t do we’ll soon try something else. We’re going to Tamatave, and you’re both coming with us.’

‘It is my native home,’ said Ranavo solemnly. ‘If I return to it, I must fight for my beloved country. I return not.’

‘We’re going there and you’re both coming with

us,' repeated Jones for the third time 'Robinson, be ready Ranavo, go below and keep up full steam for your beloved country'



THE PISTOL WAS LEVELLED STRAIGHT AT HIS HEAD

The Hova obeyed at once he noticed Robinson's fingers closing on something that glittered

We'll lay our course for Tamatave *now*,' continued Jones 'Chang-To, port your helm!'

'No portee helmee,' said the Chinaman

The next instant the pistol in Robinson's hand was levelled straight at his head

'Chang-To, port your helm!'

With a smile about as broad as the beam of the launch—

'Portee helmee velly quickee'—and over went the wheel of the *Prairie Flower*

CHAPTER XVII

THE PLOTS THAT FAILED

THOSE on board the yacht that sailed west from Mauritius in search of the runaway never knew how close to her at one time they were. In this wise:

While daylight lasted the launch was kept to her course towards the coast of Madagascar, but Chang-To and Ranavo, united for individual reasons in a mutual objection to the voyage, found an opportunity to concoct and agree to a plot for putting her back on her old course under cover of night.

Taking advantage of the absence of the 'owners' from deck for the purpose of a carousal in the cabin, the Chinaman whistled softly for the Hova, who understood the signal and stealthily joined him.

'Not small piecee likee go Tamatave.'

'I go not,' said the haughty Hova curtly.

'You go velly quickee all same time,' was the other's incontrovertible asseveration. 'But plesently comee night, and then new dev'ls go sloop. Same time new dev'ls sleep, we turn lound, go backee Maulitius. When

wakee up, new devls say large piecee cussee words, but no can lun away again for leason all inside dockee'

Ranavo's dusky eyes gleamed, and a very few words—exchanged between them mainly in a nondescript jargon which would baffle translation—sufficed to settle the even fewer details of the cunning Chinaman's scheme

Just before the fall of the brief-lasting shadows that ushered in the sudden tropical night he had the little steamer's lights all ready. But Jones, coming on deck just as he was about to fix them in position, peremptorily ordered him to extinguish them. 'We'll show no lights to-night,' had been decided beforehand, 'for fear of guiding a possible pursuit.' And 'we'll show no lights to-night,' was now his order to Chang-To.

'No lightee lamps, all lun down,' was the Chinaman's form of expostulation.

'We'll see that a sharp look-out is kept and chance being run down. Put those lights out.'

The command was reluctantly, though smilingly, complied with.

Down came the night, and through its darkness drove the *Pravie Flower*.

'One of us must go on deck at least every hour,' said Jones. 'There's no sort of treachery those two fellows are not capable of. We'd better take two hours in turn

to keep a watch on them—that'll see us through the night. I'll be responsible for the first two hours.'

His suggestion was agreed to, and the others turned in. He put a bottle on the table and opened a box of cigars, and helped himself from both. By and by, under the influence of one or the other or the combined influence of both, his eyes closed.

More than two hours had passed before he opened them.

When he did wake he woke with a start, and bolted on deck.

The night was now clear and fine, but before it had become so, two things had happened. Chang-To and Ranavo had wore the little steamer round and laid her, head on, for Port Louis, towards which she had made fully twenty knots. And the second happening was that in the darkness the yacht in chase had crossed the bows of the unlighted launch within rifle-shot.

In his plot to outwit the 'new dev'ls' Chang-To had reckoned without taking into account the alertness of the 'new dev'l' who discovered the change of the boat's course on reaching the deck.

It was well for both Chinaman and Malagash that Jones had not Robinson's pistol—or his own—upon him. As it was he used some *very* 'large piecee cussee words,' and laid about him with fists and feet with a

fine impartiality, both as regards those weapons of offence and the pair of scuffling unfortunates who were made to feel them. He hit one while he kicked the other, and then reversed the order of the programme. He had the boat put about again, rushed back to the cabin, consulted chart and compass, and corrected her course a point or two, all before he had recovered his breath.

He gave a chance of no more 'treachery' that night. But in the small hours of the morning Ranavo—who had changed places with Chang-To—alarmed at the ripping speed at which the craft was tearing ahead for his 'beloved country,' left the wheel for a few minutes and peered below, where he saw the latter shovelling fuel into the furnace at a furious rate.

'Hi! Hi! Chang-To—what are you doing?'

'Allee lightee,' his mate cheerfully reassured him, pointing towards the indicator. 'New dev'l findee out our tlick, but we no go Tanatave all same time—now play new tlick. Clockee chop-chop' (he meant the indicator) 'eighteen. I make clockee chop-chop go twenty. Same time clockee chop-chop twenty, we all go bangee up!'

But the realisation of the amiable Chang-To's inspiration to combine suicide with murder was frustrated, and they didn't 'all go bangee up.' Ranavo, who felt that

on the whole he would rather even face the contingency of having to fight for his beloved country than soar to worlds unknown on such a short invitation, arrested the next shovelful on its way to the flames, and threatened to call down the vengeance of the 'new dev'ls' on to poor Chang's shaven head—as well as to secure their summary intervention—unless he engaged to desist from his mad determination.

Ranavo glanced round tremblingly, as though he feared that one or other of the 'new dev'ls' might have approached within ear-range, as he suggested an alternative method of making the prosecution of the voyage impracticable, or at least of ensuring its delay.

His idea was to make a hole in the boiler.

Chang-To's habitual smile broadened into a grin of delight, and while Smith, Jones, Robinson, and Brown were eating the breakfast they made him prepare, he and Ranavo effected the desired mischief. This consummated, he burst into the cabin in a frenzied state of trepidation.

'Ship sinkee!' he squealed. 'Boiler all clackee!'

'Ships don't float on their boilers. If this is some more of your work, Pigtail,' Jones warned him, 'your head will soon be all crackee too. This is some more of this precious pair's doing,' he observed, as a hurried move was made to inspect the damage. 'I said we

should have trouble with them, and we're getting it thick.'

The injury to the boiler had been inflicted artistically. In fact, the job had been done so neatly that the fact that it had been done purposely would only have been obvious to more experienced eyes than those of the landsmen who now examined it. Nevertheless Jones chose to assume a knowledge he did not possess.

'You two have cracked this boiler with your own rascally hands, you rebellious hounds,' he cried furiously. 'Let fly at both of them,' he whispered to Robinson, 'when we jump aside, but don't hit.'

A moment afterwards Robinson discharged two chambers of his revolver, aiming at the engine-room stairs, near the foot of which stood Chang and Ranavo. A piercing scream followed the report.

'You fool!' shouted Jones, 'I told you not to hit. You've floored one of 'em.'

As the smoke cleared away it was seen that the victim was not the 'heathen Chinee,' for he remained standing on the same spot, smiling, though evidently frightened. Ranavo was nowhere to be seen.

'He must be somewhere!' exclaimed Robinson. 'I'll swear I didn't hit him.'

Jones stepped to an adjacent coal-bunker and lifted the lid. 'Come out of it,' he cried, as he discerned

within the form of the valiant Hova, whose emergence he hastened with a rough hand. He pitched him towards the Chinaman and addressed the pair of them.

'The next time we shoot there won't be any chance for either of you to hide in a bunker or anywhere else. The next two bullets will mean two dead men, for the two bullets will make two holes in you—one hole in each carcass. And they'll be fired slick if this boiler isn't put right by the time we come to look at it again. So get to work at it.'

'Wantee breakfast,' suggested Chang-To.

'There won't be a bite or a sup for either of you till the boiler's repaired.'

'The fire's out,' announced Purdyke, opening the furnace-door.

'Allee lightee,' said Chang; 'boiler clackee, put out fire, all same time.'

'Not a bite or a sup,' repeated Jones, 'till the boiler's mended, the fire made, and steam up.'

'New tlick found out, all same old tlick,' remarked the yellow conspirator to the tawnier one complacently, when they found themselves alone. 'Next tlick, smashee machinely.'

It was past noon before either of them breakfasted, for the conditions under which they were to be per-

mitted to do so were rigidly observed—'boiler mended, fire made, steam up.'

In the middle of the second night during Brown's watch, the effect of the third 'click' was hazarded. A whirring and whizzing of the 'machinery' were followed by some erratic gyrations of the screw, which then stopped its revolutions altogether with a sudden jerk.

'Dev'l jumpee in machinery,' reported Chang-To to Brown, 'all go smashee-smashee. Much better you go call Jones, Lobinson, Smit.'

They didn't need calling. The jerk and stoppage had effectually roused all three.

'You come looker machinery, Jones,' said the 'British subject' as blandly as though he were inviting a familiar friend to drop in and have a cup of tea any time he was passing.

This time Jones was fairly nonplussed. Although he felt certain that another 'click' had been played, he was little disposed to carry out his threat of 'two bullets and two bodies,' for the services of the two tricksters were indispensable. On the contrary he temporised. He affected to swallow the glib misrepresentations of the mendacious Chang-To, backed up uncompromisingly by Ranavo.

'What are we to do?' he asked Purdyke aside. 'Whatever has gone wrong with the machinery, and

however it has been "got at" to be made to go wrong, we are helpless without these rascals. Whether they can put it right or not, it is certain that we can't'

'Let us parley with them,' advised Purdyke—'find out their price, and pay it.'

'Their price for what?'

'Taking us where we want to go without any more "accidents." You've tried your way with them, and failed. Now let me tackle them.'

'Do what you like; on the understanding that if you have no better luck than I've had with them we shoot them off-hand, whatever the consequences may be,' was the reckless rejoinder.

Purdyke's proposition was to try on a form of gentle persuasion. It succeeded so well that the third 'click' was the last one that was tried.

CHAPTER XVIII

‘SHIP, AHOY!’

HE invited the two recalcitrants below, where he re-lit the little swinging lamp and placed on the table a decanter which had already done a good deal of service there, with three glasses. Filling two of them, he placed them in his guests' willing hands, and bade them to be seated.

‘Chang-To,’ he began, smiling almost as urbanely as that worthy himself, ‘you don’t want to go to Madagascar?’

‘Not small piecee, Smit,’ he was answered promptly. ‘Blitish subject.’

‘Quite so: I don’t doubt it for a moment. But why shouldn’t British subjects go to Madagascar? What is the particular objection in your case?’

Chang-To explained with engaging frankness.

‘At Tamatave I mallied large piecee girl and got tlee childlen. Not likee my wife and tlee childlen, so I lun away to Maulitius. At Portee Louis mallied another girl—small piecee girl—no childlen. Likee small piecee

girl no children velly much. All same time large piecee girl Tamatave see me again, she whackee me—all same time I go back small piecee girl Maulitius, I whackee her I whackee wife, velly nicee, wife whackee me—ugh!'

Purdyke turned to the Hova

'Ranavo, you don't want to go either? Is yours another case of a deserted wife? Is it a fight with your beloved wife as well as a fight for your beloved country that you're afraid of?'

'No—but I go not The French are in my beloved country, and it would break my heart to see them there'

'Well now, I feel, do you know, really grieved about it, but there's no help for it You've both got to go—it's far better there should be no mistake whatever about that But it pains me to think that there's a broken heart for one of you and a broken head for the other at the end of our journey It occurs to me, Chang-To, that for twenty dollars you could hire somebody to whack your large wife before she gets a chance of whacking you, and I think, my gallant Ranavo, that the same sum would go a long way towards patching up your broken heart.'

There was a good deal in all this that neither could follow, but each seized the main point with business-like perspicuity

'One hundled dollars,' stipulated Chang-To promptly. 'Blitish subject. We take steam dev'l no more ticks Tamatave, two hundled dollars—eachee one hundled. You and Jones and Blown and Lobinson go ashore—we turn steam dev'l lound and go backee Maulitius. Not see large piecee wife at all.'

'Twenty dollars each,' repeated Purdyke; 'ten when the machinery is put right again, and the other ten when we reach Tamatave. As soon as we have landed, you can take the launch where you like. That's a very good idea'

'Two hundled dollars,' smiled Chang-To.

The difference was compromised, a bargain being struck that forty 'dollars' were to be equally divided between the pair the moment the machinery was proved to be in working order again, and a like sum was to be paid them at Tamatave. The third condition of the contract was the one already stipulated for, that as soon as the four 'passengers' had landed, the 'crew' of two should be given unrestricted possession of the vessel to sail her whithersoever they would.

Chang-To was so elated that he solemnly broke a saucer by way of pledging his oath to observe good faith.

'Will you tell Mr. Jones I want to see him at once?'

'Tell evelyboddy,' promised Chang, as he and Ranavo

hastened away to exorcise the 'dev'l' that had 'jumpee in machinely.'

Purdyke explained to 'evelybody' what he had just arranged.

'So you see,' he concluded earnestly, 'we've got to decide what to do with these fellows when they have taken us to Tamatave, and how to do it. We can't afford to stop short of *anything*—you understand me?—in order to prevent their return to Mauritius. That must be made impossible'

'Absolutely.'

Chang-To and Ranavo worked hard all the rest of the night, and soon after break of day claimed the first moiety of their eighty dollars, which was paid to them in English gold as soon as they had demonstrated, by getting the launch under way again, that they had earned it, and before the week's provisions on board were exhausted the rugged coast of East Madagascar was sighted, without further adventure or mishap, just before nightfall.

'Landee oh!' squeaked Chang-To down the companion-way; and up sprang 'evelybody' to the deck.

It was decided that that night the launch should show her lights and proceed under reduced steam, not attempting to enter port till dawn. Jones had an uneasy suspicion that they had as likely as not failed

to shape a true course for Tamatave; if so, to discover their exact whereabouts would be (for them) a difficult task in any circumstances, and at night was an impossible one. So the orders were given:—

‘Slow steam ahead, Ranavo, for an hour. Keep her helm steady so, *Chang-To*.’

‘Velly good, Jones; Blitish subject.’

When little more than an hour had passed, it was deemed safer to lie-to till daylight.

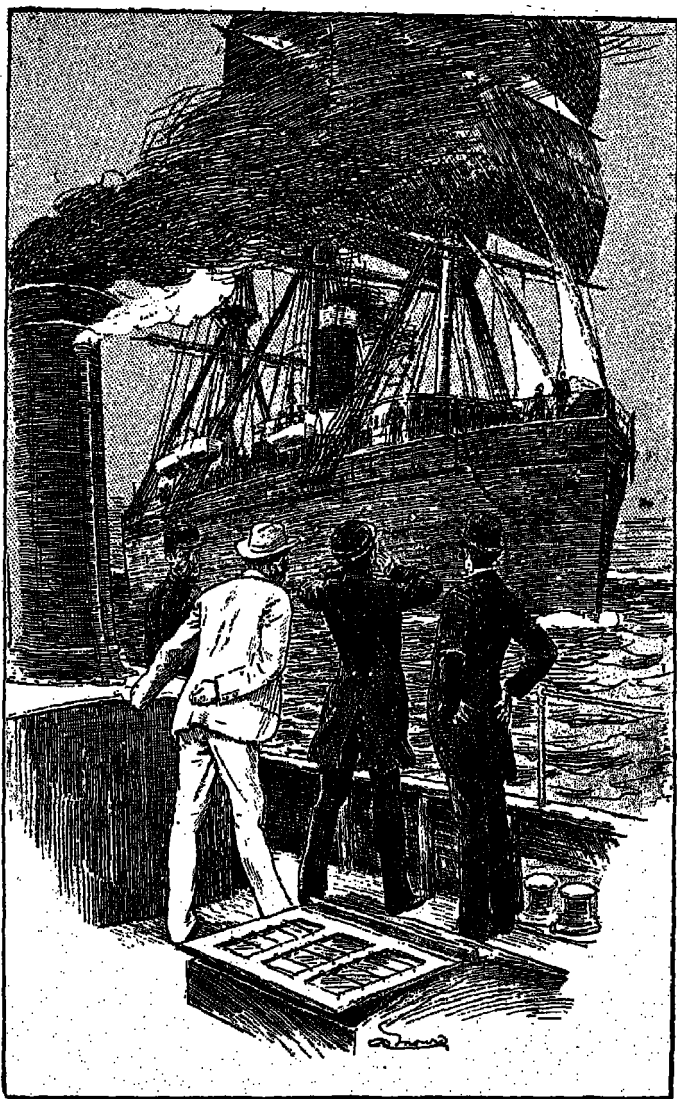
Dawn revealed no signs of Tamatave, but it showed the anxious watchers in the *Prairie Flower* the sight of a grey-painted steamer coming slowly within hail of them from the south. Jones, confirmed in his idea that they had missed their proper course, instantly proposed to speak her.

‘If we’ve dropped too far south, ten to one she’s bound to the very port we want. If so, we can follow her; and at all events she can put us right for it.’

In the still morning air sounds that came from the sluggishly approaching ship could already be heard. Jones stood ready to hail her as soon as she came within comfortable speaking distance.

‘Your uniform!’ exclaimed Gregory Purdyke suddenly; ‘and yours, Robinson. You’ve both forgotten to change.’

‘So we have! But it’s too late to change now—they



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must have been noticed—she’s not a thousand yards off We must “play at being policemen” a little longer. I don’t see that it matters. Let’s see what’s the proper way of hailing a ship? Here goes —

‘Ship, ahoy!’

‘Ahoy!’ came rolling back in a clear, strong voice.

‘What ship’s that?’

‘Steamer *Cameroon*, disabled—Cherbourg to Tamatave’

‘*Cameroon!*’ cried Purdyke ‘Why, that’s the ship whose name we made use of——’

But his voice was drowned in the sound of the strident challenge from the *Cameroon* —

‘What launch is that?’

‘We must carry it through now,’ said Jones hurriedly ‘Police launch from Mauritius,’ he shouted boldly

‘Stand by.’

The ship drew almost alongside, and as nearly as possible ceased her slow motion Then a man who appeared to be her master came to her side and looked down into the launch.

‘Police launch from Mauritius—with police-officers on board, too?’

‘Yes; we want to know——’

‘Make fast’—and overside rattled a line and a rope-ladder. ‘Come aboard, please. You’re wanted.’

Purdyke bolted incontinently into the cabin—‘you’re wanted’ had an ominous ring in it Jones and Robinson, to whom the peremptory invitation seemed more particularly addressed, looked alarmed and reluctant, but, realising that they had very little choice in the matter, clambered up the swinging ladder and saluted the captain of the *Cameroon* on his deck

‘Whatever has brought you so far out,’ said the captain, addressing Jones, whose uniform bore the correct badges of superior rank, ‘this is a fortunate meeting I have a gentleman on board whom it would be my duty to hand over to your custody but for the fact that he is only waiting for the sight of the first British official in a position to receive his self-surrender. In the present state of affairs at Tamatave, a lot of time will probably be saved by your taking him off now I presume you return to Mauritius?’

Glad to seize any chance of evading an immediate answer to this question, Jones pointed aloft, and said quickly:—

‘You speak of British officials, but you fly the French flag, sir.’

‘And the English,’ returned the captain, pointing to where the Union Jack hung motionless in the breezeless air. ‘My ship is English-owned, but chartered by the French Government to carry stores into Tamatave

for their troops. If you will follow me, I will introduce you to the gentleman who is so anxious to become your prisoner’

‘What is his name, captain?’ asked Jones, assuming an official air

‘Percy Clive Casselden’

CHAPTER XIX

‘WHAT SHALL WE DO WITH HIM?’

JONES grasped the extraordinary situation in a moment, but was completely at a loss how to deal with it.

‘What am I to do?’ he thought; ‘how are we to act?’

Every instant that gave him opportunity to think was precious, and, more to gain as much time as possible than from any other motive, he asked anxiously—

‘What are the circumstances of the case, Captain ——’

‘Pennack.’

‘Captain Pennack? It seems a strange one.’

‘It is a strange one. I am from Cherbourg to Tamatave direct, *via* the Cape. Two hours from Cherbourg, where I had to put in after loading the bulk of my cargo at Southampton, I picked up Mr. Casselden clinging to a life-belt, far more dead than alive. As soon as we’d nursed him round he told me who he was, and wanted me to land him at the first port I could make for, but my charter wouldn’t allow it. A hundred miles south of St. Helena my machinery broke

down, and it's been slow work ever since. A Cape steamer spoke us, and threw on board a packet of papers, from which we heard for the first time of the hue and cry after my passenger. Of course, you know all about the affair?’

‘Yes,’ said Jones, with unusual truthfulness.

‘Then I think I’ve told you all that’s necessary. I shall be glad if you will act promptly, for I’m so much overdue that I’m anxious to push on. Here, boy, is Mr. Casselden up?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Then this way, please.’

Jones had now made up his mind how to act and what to do.

‘One minute, Captain Pennack, please.’

He turned to Robinson.

‘Just tell them to pass up a pair of handcuffs.’

‘Nothing of that sort will be necessary,’ remonstrated Captain Pennack. ‘As I’ve told you, your man is only too anxious——’

But Jones interrupted him with a curt—

‘I know my duty, sir, and how to do it,’ and repeated his order to his supposed subordinate, adding in a low and hasty aside—

‘And see that the word is passed to Purdyke to lie low, and on no account to come out of the cabin.’

Robinson spoke the launch below, and shortly returned to the captain and Jones, clinking the manacles the latter had sent him for

‘Just step with me into the chart-house, and I’ll send a word of explanation to Mr. Casselden and ask him to join us there. He has no traps to pack.’

The three had not long to wait after the despatch of Captain Pennack’s communication. Calm, self-possessed, dignified, Percy Casselden entered the chart-house. First exchanging a brief greeting with the master of the ship, he turned to the other two.

‘You are English police-officers?’ he remarked courteously.

‘Yes—from Mauritius.’

‘Quite so. I am Percy Clive Casselden, and I place myself in your hands.’

At a sign from Jones, Robinson produced the handcuffs. Casselden drew himself up haughtily.

‘Surely, in the circumstances, there is no need to subject me to indignity. I protest against the unnecessary violence of putting those things upon my wrists.’

‘So do I,’ said Pennack.

‘I know my duty, and how to do it,’ insisted Jones again, doggedly.

‘But be good enough to bear in mind that I have voluntarily surrendered myself.’

'I hold a warrant for your arrest, all the same. You can have the gratification of hearing me read it, if you like, or the formality can be dispensed with.'

This was a perfectly safe offer, for the warrant in question was not farther away than Purdyke's pocket-book.

'Dispense with it, by all means. Captain Pennack can bear witness to my anxiety to surrender myself on the first possible opportunity, in order to face any inquiry or any charge. I ask you to dispense also with the needless use of these handcuffs. I am ready—this moment—to accompany you. I am waiting to do so.'

Robinson glanced dubiously at his 'superior'. The latter had made up his mind.

'I have a rule, to which I can make no exception on this occasion. You will do yourself no harm by submitting quietly—and perhaps a good deal by resisting.'

'I protest, but will not resist. Captain Pennack, will you shake hands with me before mine are shackled like a convict's?'

'That I will,' replied the seaman heartily, suiting the action to the words, 'for I believe your hand to be that of an honest man.'

'Thank you. Next time you shake it——'

'It will be the hand of a free man.'

'Thank you again. And now'—facing round to Jones—'do as you will.'

The next minute—handcuffed—he was conducted over the ship's side into the launch.

'Cast off'—and the *Cameroon* resumed her slow way to Tamatave.

'Gettee up steam?' asked Chang-To.

He eyed the newcomer curiously, but he had had such strange experiences with the 'new dev'ls' during the last few days that his limited capacity for being perturbed was well-nigh exhausted, and he made no remark beyond his 'Gettee up steam?'

'No,' answered Jones; 'do nothing until you're told to do something.'

'Allee lightee, Jones,' was the cheerful rejoinder.

Casselden quietly took the seat to which he was pointed, forward of the skylight, and without a word Jones and Robinson descended to the cabin, where they broke the astounding intelligence to Smith and Brown.

'Percy Casselden on board the launch!' gasped Purdyke, the quivering of his frightened voice sounding all the more significant because that voice was pitched so low. 'Then he's followed me up all the way; he's after me. For Heaven's sake, Greyling,

Turburton, Farmer'—in the extremity of his agitation he named them all—'don't let him get at me. He'll kill me. Tie him down—keep him away from me. Bind his hands together. Where are those links you chained on me?'

'On *him*. Didn't I tell you he was our *prisoner*?'

'Yes, yes, Greyling, you did. I forgot. The shock has unnerved me completely. I shall be able to grasp it all better directly.'

There were no signs left now of his bravado and *sang-froid*. Not only his hands but his whole body shook and trembled as he poured out and swallowed a half-tumbler of neat brandy.

'The sooner you pull yourself together and realise what has taken place the better, for we're in a pretty fix. We've got him; that's the fact we have to deal with. We had no choice but to take him,' said Greyling.

'No, no, you did quite right; it's far better that he's with us—in our power, our prisoner. What shall we do with him?'

'I was coming from the fact to the problem—you've taken it out of my mouth. What *shall* we do with him?'

Nobody answered. The four looked blankly at each others' faces.

What cowardly thought was shaping itself in Gregory Purdyke's evil heart as he said at last, his voice still trembling—

'We've no chance of carrying out the plans we've formed, or any other, while he's . . .'

He hesitated, and then, as though substituting other words for the word he was about to use, finished his sentence very slowly—

. . . while he is—with us'

No voice replied. Was the thought taking more definite shape that he suggested —

'There are four of us to one—and he's handcuffed'

Still no voice answered him. Again he stretched out his hand for the brandy, and this time the glass from which he drank was more than half full.

When he spoke again his whisper sounded like a hiss.

Casselden must die !'

CHAPTER XX

‘HOIST WITH HIS OWN PETARD’

‘NO!’

Each of the three men to whose ears that hissing whisper penetrated was a villain, but each joined in that emphatic ‘no.’ Even Jones, who had spoken so coolly of pitching overboard the two mutinous foreign hands, rejected with a shudder—was it of fear or indignation?—the cold-blooded proposal to rid themselves of their English prisoner by murdering him.

‘I’ll have no hand in that game,’ he declared, ‘while there’s a single possibility left of anything safer.’

‘Nor I,’ joined in Robinson and Brown together.

‘What other single possibility *is* left?’ persisted Purdyke

‘It’s for us to think of one’

‘Think of it, then I can’t.’

‘He’s in our power,’ reflected Jones slowly aloud. ‘As you said just now, it’s a case of four against one. Let’s make him a fair offer. He ought to be in a mood to close with it—he’s by no manner of means in

an enviable position himself. It's one thing for him to assert that he's innocent and for us to know it, but he'd find it quite a different thing to prove it. He'd better stand in for his share of the spoil, and throw in his lot with ours.

'We'd better have our purses squeezed than run the risk of getting our necks wrung. A Chinaman or a Malagash whom nobody would be likely to bother about isn't in the same running as an Englishman the police are looking for all over the world.'

'He'll never do it,' cried Purdyke. 'You don't know him—I do; and I say your idea is absolutely hopeless. No bribe would tempt him. Your plan's out of the question.'

'No, it isn't. You forget that we're not all quite in the same boat, though we've had occasion to remind you of the circumstance before.'

'What do you mean?'

'Exactly what I say. We're *not* in the same boat with you. Necks are wrung once for one murder, but not twice for two murders. You wouldn't risk by a second what we should risk by a first. Now do you understand?'

The taunt was not understood. It was misunderstood. For Purdyke, to whose face the brandy had brought back the colour and whose hands and voice were steadier now, replied—

'Very well; you three needn't be in it. Whether we take him with us or let him go, he'll split on all of us. He'll know our lost trail and will put the bloodhounds on it. I'll do it myself.'

'That cock won't fight,' said Jones, almost flippantly.

'We should all be in it as accessories before the act. Unless you can show a solid objection to trying my plan——'

'I can,' put in Purdyke eagerly.

'What is it?' asked the other three, Brown and Robinson having shown a decided inclination to follow the lead of Jones.

'This. You can't broach your precious *plan* to him without letting the 'cat out of the bag as to your no more being police-officers than he is. So long as he's ignorant of that—and doesn't see me—he'll go wherever we take him like a lamb. Of course, the time would soon have to come when the game couldn't be kept up any longer, and it's to that time I'm looking forward; but things might be safer then, though they could never be safe. So long as he doesn't know who you are, but believes you to be what you are not, you've got a lamb to lead, as I said just now; but it's equally certain that as soon as he does know you'll have a lion to fight.'

It was evident from the faces of his listeners that

this reasoning hit home. One after the other they admitted that he was right

‘It’s easier to object than to propose,’ snarled the originator of the now discarded second suggestion. The next moment—‘I have it!’ exclaimed Purdyko. ‘You *shall* keep up your character as well as—two of you—keep on your uniform. There’s certain to be an English man-o’-war or gunboat at Tamatave—there *is* one. An English ship is English territory. In “character” and in uniform you, Jones and Robinson—Brown is our plain-clothes man, he played that part splendidly before—you and Robinson will board her with your prisoner. Spinning a yarn that you’re on a cruise of inspection amongst the islands, you’ll hand him over to the custody of the captain. The captain will telegraph home for instructions, and ten to one they’ll send a man out to take the celebrated Percy Casselden back with him for trial. That’s the second-best way of getting rid of him.’

In his excitement he spoke louder than any of them had spoken yet, and his excitement communicated itself to the others. Barely had his ingenious scheme been made clear before it was agreed to with smothered acclamation

A strange look—as though he too had thought of something startling suddenly—crossed the fox-like face

of Jones. However, he said nothing, and the look passed as suddenly as it had come. But just a suspicion of it returned a minute or two later when he interrupted a low-toned but animated discussion of what steps were to follow immediately on the surrender of their 'prisoner' by asking Robinson and Brown to go on deck with him.

'We may as well tell P. C. C. what's in store for him,' he observed pleasantly. 'Smith, don't you forget for a solitary instant that your interesting features are not to be seen outside this cabin till all is over.'

'The caution is scarcely necessary.'

'Come right aft,' said Jones as he and his two companions gained the deck.

Aft they walked with him, and there a long mysterious conversation, led by him, passed in muttered and muffled tones between them. As it closed, some important decision seemed, from their manner, to have been arrived at.

'Gettee up steam now, Jones?' asked Chang-To once more, approaching the group.

'Yes, at once.'

'How far have we come wrong?' asked Brown. 'What did they tell you on board the *Cameroon*?'

'We forgot to ask a single question, and no wonder. But there's the ship ahead—we can't go wrong.'

Brown walked to the bows

'Casselden, we've decided not to run back with you to Mauritius, but to take you to Tamatave, where we shall no doubt find an English man-o'-war to put you aboard of'

'I hope you won't be disappointed. The captain of the *Cameroon* was under the impression that the British warships had left Tamatave. Was there not some dispute between them and the French admiral?'

'A row with the French admiral would be far more likely to keep them there than send them away. I share your hope that your skipper was mistaken. There are reasons which would make any other plan of dealing with you inconvenient. However, we shall soon know. Do you happen to be aware how far off the captain of the *Cameroon* reckoned his ship to be from her destination when we hailed him this morning?'

'I understood between seventy and eighty miles. You are steering in his course now?'

'Yes'—and Brown strolled away.

Quickly and easily out-pacing the *Cameroon*, the little *Prairie Flower* raced on for hours gallantly ahead of her. When the town hove in sight round a curve of the coast the small steamer was about midway between it and the larger steamer

‘Now then,’ ordered Jones, who had remained on deck all the time, ‘up with the bunting. And go below, Chang-To, and bring me up the glass.’

The launch’s false colours were displayed—the glass was put in his hands

As the low-lying town was neared and the masts of a number of ships were made out, Casselden’s anxiety to discern the flag of a British war-ship was at least as eager as that of any one else on the launch’s deck. Forgetting that his hands were manacled, he even begged the loan of the glass.

Jones kept it to his own eye, and was consequently the first to announce that they were not to be disappointed. A British gunboat or battleship was riding at anchor with the others

From hand to hand passed the telescope.

‘There’s no mistake about it?’ said Jones.

‘None,’ confirmed Robinson.

‘It’s all right, Casselden,’ said Brown, in a louder voice. ‘Your skipper was wrong. You’re not to be disappointed.’

‘You want gun-dev’l boat, allee lightee,’ cried Chang-To, snatching up the glass and holding it to his wrong eye. ‘Blitish fighting shippeo, Blitish flag—Blitish subject!’

The glass was presently superfluous: her Majesty’s

gunboat *Felix* stood out boldly to the view of the naked eye.

'Shall I tell him?' asked Brown, with a gesture towards the cabin.

'No,' replied Jones, adding significantly; 'he'll find out soon enough.'

He took the helm in his own hands.

'Ease her—slow.'

Clumsily, but as well as he was able to, he steered the launch alongside the man-o'-war, answering the challenge of the sentry, who passed the word that the police-boat from Mauritius had made fast, and police-officers were coming on board.

Casselden stood up.

'Sit down,' commanded Jones. 'Brown, you will remain in charge of the prisoner while Robinson and I make our report to the captain.'

Up the lowered gangway went the pair. With only the delay of the ordinary formalities they were ushered into the presence of the naval commander himself.

In clear, concise, official phraseology, with no more preamble than was called for by the (supposed) circumstances, Jones informed the captain of the *Felix* that he had to hand over to his custody the persons of Percy Clive Casselden and—Gregory Purdyke!

'My responsibility will begin where yours will cease

—on the deck of my ship Bring your prisoners aboard'

'Yes, sir. Robinson!'

Robinson instantly left the cabin.



THE STRUGGLING FORM OF GREGORY PURDYKE WAS DRAGGED ON BOARD

'I'll take over the custody of the prisoners on deck. Come with me,' said Captain Brandon abruptly.

He, with Jones close behind him, was there amidship as Percy Casselden — calm still and dignified still,

bowing his head slightly but gracefully over his gyved hands as his eyes fell on the uniform we are all proud to honour—stepped up from the *Prairie Flower*

A minute later the struggling form of Gregory Purdyke was dragged on board by the united strength of Robinson and Brown

A file of marines quietly fell in between the gangway and the spot where stood the strange group of five from the launch before the captain of the man-o'-war and two of his officers, who had now joined him

Looking each man in the face as he addressed him, Captain Brandon said—

‘Gregory Purdyke—Percy Clive Casselden, you are prisoners on board her Majesty’s ship *Felix*!’

CHAPTER XXI

UNCLE CALEB

SOON after the return of the pinnace from her fruitless run to the Isle of Bourbon, the *Iron Duke* cleared from Port Louis and resumed her voyage

More bitter than the disappointment of any one else was that of Mrs Casselden at the escape of her husband's late partner Strong as ever was her belief in that husband's innocence Unfortunate, indiscreet, deceived, he might have been, but guilty of fraud, embezzlement, or any wilful wrong-doing, never! And it was her rooted conviction that the capture and trial of Gregory Purdyke would bring to light facts which would clear the memory of the man she had loved, and loved now, and must love for ever—through all the years of her widowhood, and the years of the life beyond them

With all his heart Colin shared the hope in which she still indulged that the vigilance of the men whom Purdyke had succeeded in tricking and baffling for

the present would yet enable them to turn the tables upon him.

The indignation of Sam Sims was characteristically expressed.

'Bamboozled everybody again,' was the burden of his plaint; 'and took 'is 'ook a second time—with my keb and two 'orses in 'is pocket!'

Colin took an early opportunity of broaching to him and Dick his project that they should break off their journey with him and his mother at Hobart. With scarcely a hint of his real motives in urging his suggestion—though both Sam and Dick saw through them easily enough—he enlarged upon the probable value of his uncle's interest in promoting the welfare of them all.

'If either you or Dick had any definite prospects in New Zealand, Sam, I shouldn't like to say anything to induce you to alter your plans; but it seems to me that neither of you has.'

'We ain't,' said Sam, with his usual candour.

'Then what do you say to my proposal?'

'What is this 'ere huncle 'Olmes of yours, Master Colin?'

'I don't exactly know, Sam. But he ships things, you know, from Tasmania, and imports other things into it; and he has stores, and a big farm.'

'Got any kebs to drive, d'yer think?'

'I'm afraid not'

'Orses?'

'He's certain to have—plenty of them. And as to Dick here—of course, it's only an idea of mine, but I know Mr. Holmes has a growing family of boys, and some time ago these cousins of mine had to ride a tremendous way to school, because the family live some distance up country; and if uncle should want a tutor for them, why, Dick would be the very fellow to give 'em a grinding.'

'So 'e would, sir—so 'e cert'nly would,' assented Sam, who had a profound veneration for his nephew's not equally profound erudition. 'The fact is,' he continued, 'me and Dick 'ave 'ad some jaws abaht this 'ere job, and we're o' one mind as fur as the main p'int is concerned.'

'Well?'

'Tell him, Dick.'

'The long and the short of it is, Mr Casselden,' said young Bundick—'and I hope I shall make our meaning clear without giving you offence or hurting your feelings—that if you mean, and are honestly sure, that by tacking on to you, so to speak, we incur no danger of becoming a drag or a nuisance, then thank you heartily for your interest in us, and we'll

land with you. But unless we are made to feel sure that you won't ever let us be what I've said, then thank you heartily all the same, and we won't.'

'That's the ticket,' said Sam approvingly.

Colin having no hesitation in giving the required assurance, the understanding that they were to stick together was completed on the spot.

'Let us go right away and tell Captain Bridge about the change in your plans. He's such a right-down good fellow that I'm sure he'll use his influence to get you allowed something off your passage money as you are not going to complete the voyage you paid for.'

'That's a good idea,' agreed Sam, 'and worth trying on.'

The idea was 'tried on' accordingly, Captain Bridge readily promising to indorse the application to his owners.

'I'm glad you're not going to lose sight of Sims,' he said to Colin in a long and confidential chat they had together afterwards, 'for a reason which has possibly not occurred to you.'

'What is that, sir?'

'Just this. I wouldn't give much for Gregory Purdyke's chances of ultimate escape, and I understand this man is the cabman who drove him to

Waterloo on the day he absconded, and who afterwards took back to the bank and handed to your father the pocket-book he found in his cab after his fare had left it.'

'That is so, captain.'

'Very well, then; if Purdyke is ever caught—as I believe he will be—and put on his trial, the prosecution will want to trace his every movement on the day in question, and Sims will certainly be an important witness in one respect. So it's far better that it should be known where he is instead of the police having to scour about New Zealand to find him when the time comes.'

'What you point out had never once occurred to me, Captain Bridge; but I can see how important it is.'

'Colin, have you ever asked Sims whether he opened that pocket-book, and if so what he found in it?'

'No. The—the subject was connected with too painful a one for me to care to ask many questions about it. I think you know all that Sam has ever told me.'

'I asked,' said Captain Bridge thoughtfully, 'because it has more than once struck me that the book may have contained a clue of which everybody seems ignorant.'

Most of the interval between the time when land was again sighted and the arrival of the ship at

Hobart was occupied by Colin in getting the belongings of his mother and himself in readiness for their approaching disembarkation, and Sam and Dick were similarly engaged forward. As she neared the wharf the two latter stood on deck just behind Colin and his mother, all eagerly scanning, with the usual interest of sea travellers in view of their destination, what could be seen of the place.

But Mrs. Casselden's eyes were soon fixed on the waiting crowd ashore. They glowed with a sudden light as they fell upon two figures standing prominently forward amongst the crowd.

'Look, Colin, look,' she exclaimed; 'there's your aunt, and that's Uncle Holmes'

Colin followed her gaze and the direction of her pointing hand.

'I should have known Aunt Florrie anywhere, mother; she's your double. What a magnificent-looking chap uncle is! I thought he came out here in a consumption.'

'So he did.'

'I say, Dick, do you hear that?' asked Colin, turning round. 'Do you see that delicate-looking eighteen-stoner with the iron-grey beard and moustache, standing with the lady who's so like my mother?'

'I see the interesting invalid—poor fellow!' replied

Dick with a laugh, as he conned admiringly the striking proportions of the colonist

‘Well, he’s like what you may aspire to be out here, for he came over from the old country in a worse state than ever you’ve been in.’

‘How do you know that?’

‘Didn’t you hear? He’s my uncle.’

Both Dick and Sam regarded the big man with increased interest at this announcement.

‘Speakin’ from a perffessional p’int o’ view,’ remarked the latter, shaking his head, ‘he’s dangerous, and ought to pay a bit over and above the lawful’

‘What do you mean, Sam?’

‘Well, Master Colin, I *’ave* knowed of a four-wheeler a-breakin’ dahn with only a trifle extry weight more than that fure a-standin’ on that there wharf carries abaht with ‘im A-beggin’ of your pardon, mum, and no offence bein’ either give or took, I ‘ope, but that lady a-cuddlin’ up by ‘is side, though she’s most your own heighth, mum, looks like a pretty doll a-leanin’ agin a blowed-aht lamp-post.’

Even Mrs Casselden could not help laughing outright at Sam’s simile

‘Really, mother,’ said Colin, ‘I never understood that there was a giant in the family.’

‘His heart’s as big as his body,’ returned the giant’s

sister-in-law enthusiastically, 'and as gentle as a child's. Your father loved him like a brother—long ago:' and a shadow stole across the smiling face. But the next moment the shadow passed, for the waiting pair on shore had just caught sight of the pair for whom they waited. Instantly Caleb Holmes doffed his broad-brimmed straw hat, which he waved with tremendous energy in the air, while 'Aunt Florrie'—with equal vigour, but with very much less effect—fluttered signals of welcome with her handkerchief.

The *Iron Duke* swung into her berth. Almost the first to board her were the big man and his little wife, the broad shoulders of the former cleaving a clear passage for both of them.

With many smiles, a few tears, and a good deal of kissing—so met the long-parted sisters. With the gentleness of strength, Caleb Holmes raised the face of his wife's sister and pressed his bearded lips to hers. Besides raising hers he had to bend his own a long way down to effect the junction. There was such an air of elder-brotherly protection in his action that Colin's heart was won at once.

'No need to introduce me to this young shaver,' said Mr. Holmes, in just the strong, cheery voice one would have expected from his physique. 'I could have picked him out from a thousand. You're Colin.'

'Yes, uncle'

Colin was more than pleased—he could not be otherwise—and more than gratified, that his uncle was so



'I COULD HAVE PICKED HIM OUT FROM A THOUSAND'

glad to greet him; but at the same time he could not help wishing that he either wouldn't shake hands quite so hard or would leave off sooner. He thought he'd

let his friends Sam and Dick see what it was like. They had modestly retired out of hearing, but he beckoned them up.

'These are two friends of mine, Uncle Caleb—Sam Sims and——'

'Never mind their names—glad to know 'em. How are you?'

'Earty, sir, thank yer—'earty. Jee-roosalem!'

'Eh?'

'All right, sir. Quite a pleasure, I assure yer. But excuse me a-cahntin' of 'em'—and Sam looked ruefully at his crushed fingers. 'Got a 'and like a wice,' he told himself under his breath.

A strangled 'Oh!' from Dick told its own pathetic story—Uncle Caleb was shaking hands with him now.

'Excuse me again, sir,' ventured Sam; 'but——'

'Certainly. What is it?'

'Well, sir, there's a under-stooard on board as me and my nevvv 'ere 'as got ahr knives into along o' the 'aughty way 'e 'ave carried 'is nose in the hair. 'E was up agin us from the first, always a-givin' the biggest basin to somebody else. 'E have tried to do us aht of ahr fair whack o' grub shameful. 'E 'ave haggererwated us to that extent as we've swore to get even with 'im by 'avin' revenge. Would yer mind shakin' 'ands with 'im before yer leave the ship?'

CHAPTER XXII

A TASTE OF TASMANIA

HIS wife touched Caleb Holmes on the elbow—she could not comfortably reach his shoulder.

‘Caleb,’ she said softly, ‘I’m going with Ada to her cabin. I’ll tell her there.’

Instantly her husband’s jolly face saddened, and there was a ring of sadness in his voice as he replied.

‘All right, dear. I’ll take the lad aside and tell *him*.’ Turning to Colin, as the ladies disappeared, he led him to a quieter part of the deck.

‘Colin,’ he said earnestly, ‘I’m going to tell you what your aunt is now telling her sister. The news is about your father.’

‘About father? Oh, uncle, is it possible that——’

‘Your father is alive, Colin—and in custody.’

Then he told his nephew the news that (as soon as it had been known at Mauritius) had been flashed around the world of the strange happening at Tamatave.

Colin said little—and felt much.

‘We’ll all get ashore, my boy, and talk everything

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‘We’ll all get ashore, my boy, and talk everything

over, and decide what to do. But, first, I want you to introduce me to your captain, so that I may hear his own account at first-hand of the extraordinary escape of Purdyke from this ship'

The introduction was soon effected, but it was some time before Captain Bridge was at liberty to enter into conversation at any length. When the conversation was over, Caleb Holmes sought his wife.

'How has Ada taken the news?' he asked anxiously.

'Badly, Caleb—very badly. At first she was greatly excited; then suddenly collapsed and fainted. I have just left her. The doctor and Colin are with her now.'

'Hadn't we better get her ashore at once?'

'Yes, dear, if the doctor will let her go. I'll return to her and see if she's better, and hear what the doctor says.'

'Tell him I should like to see him, Florrie.'

Dr. Hamilton looked rather grave as he emerged from the cabin, outside which Mr. Holmes was waiting for him.

'What is it, doctor?'

'The heart!'

was the immediate reply.

'Serious?'

'Not imminently so. I can only advise the old remedy that it's easy to prescribe but impossible to

administer—quiet' I understand that the lady is to accompany you and your wife, sir ?'

'Yes, doctor—by road Will the drive hurt her ?'

'How long is it ?'

'About twenty miles'

'There's no harm in the drive itself, but is there any medical man handy at the end of it, in case of a relapse afterwards ?'

'No, there's not one between my place and Hobart here'

'I think you may start on the drive as soon as you like,' said Dr Hamilton, after a few moments' consideration. 'but take it easily. And arrange with a doctor here to come up to your place to-morrow'

Captain Bridge himself escorted his departing passengers and their friends to the gangway, where hearty good wishes on both sides found expression with the final 'good-byes,' as all supposed they would be.

It had been hastily arranged that Sam and Dick should remain in the town overnight, and find their way to Coopersale, as the station of the Holmeses was called, the next day

'Let's be careful, Dick,' said Sam, 'or the big 'un 'll offer to shake 'ands with us again I wish we could ha' got 'im to take on that under-stooard,' he added regretfully.

In other circumstances, Colin would have enjoyed the long drive to Coopersale immensely. Unfamiliar sights opened out before him at every point, but his attention was concentrated upon his mother, whose face was still so pale, and whose eyes were so full of patiently-borne affliction.

But she roused herself as Coopersale came within view, and expressed—warmly, though quietly—her admiration of the great house, and the strange, wild beauty of its surroundings; and she would not assent to any delay in being made known to all her nephews and nieces. It was she, too, who insisted that same evening on an earnest and exhaustive discussion of the news she had had so suddenly to be made acquainted with earlier in the day. All entreaties that she would not herself speak further of that news till the morrow she waived aside.

‘I am better,’ she insisted—‘look at me. I have recovered from the first shock—the double shock of sudden joy and sudden horror; joy that my darling lives, horror because of what is before him. But now I look beyond the trial he must go through before he can prove his innocence; I look on to the acquittal that will close that trial. When first I thought him dead, I mourned that because he could never be tried he could never be found guiltless. Afterwards, when

I saw more clearly how black against him seemed what men call evidence—how it all appeared to hem him in—I thanked God that he was at peace from his false accusers. But now my old first confidence—not in his innocence, for that is founded on a rock that nothing could shake; but in his ability, by some means that lie out of the reach of our present possible knowledge, to make that innocence clear to judge and jury and the world—has come back to me. And in that confidence I shall thank his Heavenly Judge to-night, not only for his life—given back to me from the dead—but for his coming trial, as by and by I shall thank Him for the verdict. Caleb’—almost defiantly she faced her brother-in-law—‘have you ever doubted?’

‘No!’ thundered Caleb Holmes. ‘When pigs fly round the moon, and come back with stars tied to their tails; when fishes walk into the house from the river and ask me if I can oblige them with a light; when the fox chases the hounds, and the hounds hatch eggs; when the kangaroo sings psalms, and the ‘possum says his prayers up a gum-tree; when——’

‘Caleb! Caleb!’ remonstrated his little wife warningly.

With an instant change of voice and manner, the giant substituted for what he had been going to say—

‘When I cease to be afraid of my wife and my name

isn't Caleb Holmes, then I'll believe, but not before, that Percy Casselden is capable of crime.'

With a pang such as he had never experienced, Colin thought to himself—the thought came to him, thrust itself upon him, seemed to burn itself into his brain—

'Have I had this faith—I, in my own father? Haven't I funk'd facing the question, "Do you share your mother's certainty that your father is innocent of the things laid to his charge?" Deep down in my heart now, don't I remain a coward, for wouldn't I rather shirk the question still?'

'Now, Ada, let us talk of your plans here.'

'I have no plans here, Florrie. My place is not here—now. Percy will soon be in the dock; my place will be at his side, and I shall be there. If they won't let me stand with him inside, I'll try to slip my hand into his through the railings. I'm going home to England.'

Colin put his arms round her neck and kissed her tenderly. 'We are going home,' he said

'If I *have* got a lump in my throat,' observed Uncle Caleb huskily, 'it's *my* lump, and I suppose I'm at liberty to have it where I like. I'm coming with you!'

CHAPTER XXIII

ABOARD THE OLD CRAFT

COOPERSALE was early astir, as usual, next morning—the all-pervading energy of its master made it an uncomfortable place for sluggards

But when it was sought to call Mrs. Casselden, she was found to be lying, quite unconscious, in another faint. Although from this she was before long brought to, the lightest rider on the fastest horse about the homestead was sent scurrying off to Hobart to hurry up the doctor, for whom he took a spare mount. On their return the condition of both horses showed that their gallop had been a hard as well as a long one

The doctor's examination was careful and thorough, his verdict was emphatic. No thought was to be entertained of her travelling back to England for at least a month. For a time she fought against this decision. Only when the consideration was gently pressed upon her that her life was dearer and more precious to him (and to others) for whose sake she wished to jeopardise

it than it was in her own unselfish estimation, did she give way and consent to postpone her return.

Rapidly reviewing the circumstances, 'You will still be in time—almost for certain—to—to stand by his side,' said Caleb.

'But he must know that I am coming—and he must hear it all, Colin, from your lips. I feel that I shall grow better with the passing of every hour of your journey—the journey that takes you to him, the journey on which I shall follow you—and shall count every hour that takes you farther from me and nearer to him. Tell him I am coming to him—tell him I am coming, I am coming to him.'

'Colin, boy,' said his uncle quietly aside, 'I know it's hard on you to have to leave your mother in such a weak state—that that's the very reason why there's any cause to leave her at all; but your going seems the only thing that's likely to mitigate her disappointment at not being allowed to go herself immediately.'

'I see that, uncle, and I'm quite ready to start. I know what kind hands my mother will be left in. What will be my quickest route?'

'That depends upon what ships are in port, and how they are sailing. We'll go in this afternoon and see. Probably the best way will be to get to Melbourne or Sydney, and take ship from there.'

A mile or two from Coopersale they met Sam and Dick on their way there, on foot. Sam had great news. A letter from his wife had been awaiting him in Hobart for more than a week. It announced the death of her stingy brother, the whole of whose earnings she had 'come into'. Soon after she had taken up her post in his house, she had had to add the duties of nurse to her other multifarious functions. The old gentleman was too reluctant to part with any money to pay for the treatment that might have saved him, so he parted with his life instead—very reluctantly, as he had parted with everything else he had ever had to 'part' with.

'Talk abaht two 'orses and a keb,' said the lucky woman's husband, 'why, she's set up with close on a thahsand pahnds. This is a climack of the *right* sort at last'

'I'm very glad to hear it, Sam,' returned Colin, 'very glad indeed. Uncle, may my friends go on to Coopersale and wait our return? I'll tell you about them as we drive on. I meant to do so last night, only there was so much to talk about.'

'Of course they may. We keep open house out here,' was the jovial reply.

Colin hastily explained what was taking him in to the town, towards which the buggy then wheeled on its

way, while the pedestrians started off to finish their journey in the opposite direction.

The plans for the voyage home were settled with unexpected facility, for on boarding the *Iron Duke* to make some inquiries and ask some advice, Uncle Caleb and his companion learned that her master had received telegraphic orders from his owners to load at Dunedin for San Francisco direct. Re-shipping on board her, Colin from 'Frisco could proceed overland by express to New York, and from New York could reach England in a week. He would thus almost certainly be in London some time before his father and his father's fellow-prisoner could be put upon their trial there.

'And now, laddie,' said Caleb, after their return to Coopersale and another family talk was over, 'a word in your ear about some matters I don't like—money matters. I know you don't want any "ready," or you'd soon have it; but when you get to London—where, of course, you'll act under your father's instructions—there'll be some big-wigs to fee and a heap of other expenses. Well, my name is Caleb Holmes, and the London agents of my bankers are the Bank of Australasia, in Threadneedle Street. Let your father—he'll understand all about it—know that if he sends there it's all right. Shut up, and don't tell your mother.'

'She said his heart was as big as his body, and it is,' thought Colin.

'Now about these friends of yours? You say the young 'un was a Board School teacher?'

'Yes.'

'Is he all right?'

'What for, uncle?'

'Teaching my youngsters. You've seen 'em, and know their ages. The two oldest have finished their schooling, but not the others. Say the word—I think it's what you were driving at this afternoon—and he can stop here and teach their young ideas how to shoot, though it strikes me the young rascals will teach *him* a few things he isn't up to yet.'

'If it's left with me to say the word, I do say it, without any hesitation.'

'Then he's engaged. As to Sims . . . I'll send for him.'

The worthy Sam was soon in evidence.

'We were just going to talk about you, Sims.'

'And I've just been a-talkin' abaht you, sir, and abaht my goin' 'ome along o' young Mr. Casselden 'ere. The old woman 'avin' come into this 'ere fortune says in the letter what she's wrote me as I'm to go back at once and fetch 'er and the kids, instead o' them a-waitin' nahw till I've made 'em a 'ome. She says

the kids 'as been a-ahlin' reg'ler for me and Dick ever since we started; and I own up to feelin' pretty lonely withaht the old woman and them kids, and the sooner we all jines together again the sooner I shall feel better. So, if my company ain't no-hahw objected to, why shouldn't we go back together? My only trouble is abaht Dick.'

'There's no need to trouble about him, Sam; he's provided for. I beg your pardon, uncle, may I——'

'All right; go on.'

Colin told Dick's delighted uncle of Mr Holmes' offer, and wound up by declaring how glad he was to fall in with Sam's suggestion that they should sail in company.

The conference was soon over; an early move was made for bed; and with the morning came the parting, for the ship was to clear soon after noon.

'I know what's troubling you, Colin,' were almost Caleb's last words, 'and it's quite natural. Although it's by your mother's own wish—even her command—that you are returning at once, you dread the thought of her crossing the sea again later on without you. But don't be anxious. Of course I should never dream of letting her cross by herself in any circumstances, and, as a matter of fact, your aunt as well as myself will come with her. I settled all that with my wife the night before last.'

'I do believe his heart's *bigger* than his body And aunt's another' I know they can't both leave all their affairs here—or either of them, for the matter of that, of course uncle especially—without loss and awful inconvenience,' soliloquised Colin

He and Sam quietly took up their old quarters on board the *Iron Duke*, which made Dunedin after an average run. Here they chafed under an unavoidable but unlooked-for delay in loading. The delay continuing day after day, till almost a fortnight had gone from the date at which she should have got off, they were contemplating a change of ships when the welcome news was communicated to them that the hitch had been removed.

Two days afterwards she put to sea.

CHAPTER XXIV

PHANTOM SIGNALS

‘EIGHT bells. Watch below!’

Fair night had followed fair day. Almost till the set of sun the warmth had been tempered by a fresh, sweet breeze, for which the after-hours as well were all the cooler, though the heat-haze, in a thin, far-spreading vapour, hovered over the smooth waters from which it rose.

Clearer than the sun-glare of the golden noon of day was now the white radiance of the silver noon of night.

Only one or two of the fewer passengers the *Iron Duke* now carried, had found it in their hearts to go below before, but their number on deck was sensibly diminished after the changing of the watch. Colin and Sam both remained above still. ‘Let’s make a night of it,’ Colin had said, and his friend had been nothing loth.

Mr. Frost, relieved by the second mate, seemed in no hurry to seek his berth, for for some half an hour he

remained chatting with our two chums. Colin noticed that he kept looking westward.

‘No signs of a change, Mr. Frost, are there?’

‘The clouds are banking pretty thick yonder,’ replied the first mate. ‘I sha’n’t be surprised if we’re in for a thunderstorm.’

The night grew darker suddenly. Before going below, ‘Keep a sharp look-out for squalls, Mr. Langdon,’ he advised the officer of the watch.

The clouds spread till they covered almost all the sky, blotting out the starlight. The air became heavy and stifling, as though heated by the dry, oppressive fumes of some huge furnace fire.

The two or three yet lingering passengers were ordered below, and the hatchways were covered.

When the squall burst, it burst out of pitch darkness. A literally blazing and literally blinding flash of lightning, on the track of which crashed a thunder-boom that seemed to split the ship, heralded by a few seconds the mad whirlwind that struck her on the port beam. Over she canted till her starboard bulwarks were almost flush with the suddenly boiling and hissing sea.

Before she could right herself, again came the eye-dazzling forks of fire, the ear-rending roll of thunder.

Closely followed by Mr. Frost, Captain Bridge rushed on deck. Up tumbled the watch from below.

The top spars of the steamer's scanty rigging had gone like sticks in the first crack of the squall.

For a few minutes confusion reigned on the encumbered deck, but the quick, steady commands of the resourceful skipper soon restored order. Not without either difficulty or added danger, the ship's head was got about, and she was put before the driving hurricane.

Down came the rain in sheets. The lightning continued to play about the plunging, labouring steamer in flashes of flame, and the thunder pealed without intermission.

'Langdon,' said Bridge in the middle of the brief, wild confusion of the elements, 'where's Frost? I thought he was on deck, but I can't make him out anywhere.'

'Shall I pass the word for him, sir?'

'Ay, do. Send him on the bridge to me.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'Hold hard, Langdon. Forward there! What's that commotion about?'

With a hasty exclamation the second mate left the bridge and hurried to the group that had attracted the captain's attention. He helped the men lift something from the scuppers and bear it below. Then he hurriedly returned.

‘Mr Frost has been struck by lightning, sir. Dr Hamilton will be up directly to report—but I’m afraid it’s all over with him.’

And as he spoke the doctor made his appearance

‘I can do nothing,’ he said sadly. ‘Poor Frost is quite dead.’

In less than an hour the storm abated. The wind died down to the force of an ordinary breeze, the air cleared. The lightning and thunder now seemed only reflections and echoes of what had been

The ship was brought back to her old bearings, and all hands were called on to repair damages and work the pumps—for she had sprung a nasty leak; and even more serious was the report of the first engineer

But perfect discipline was maintained, and presently Captain Bridge went below to change his sodden clothing, and to view the body of his unfortunate officer. When he reappeared the storm was over, so far as the immediate vicinity was concerned, though away to the north-east, to which quarter the clouds had rolled, it was evident that it was raging afresh, though with abated force.

The hatches were removed, and some of the passengers, less scared or more quickly reassured than the others, came on deck.

Three bells—the wind was only blowing now in

irregular gusts. As the last note was struck, a sound that startled all who heard it was borne shipward, not on the wind but from leeward. It seemed like the sound of a bell from a distant ship, or the far-away echo of their own—which was impossible.

‘Langdon, did you hear that bell?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘Did you, Hamilton?’

‘Yes—it sounded clearly enough, though from a long way off.’

‘We all heard it, sir,’ put in a voice. ‘And we can’t be near land, surely, and even if we was, it wouldn’t be inhabited land hereabouts.’

‘It must have been from some ship that’s overtaken by the squall in its course east,’ said Langdon.

‘Then why can’t we see the ship as well as hear her bell? Can you make out anything to loo’ard?’

‘No, sir,’ answered the mate, after scanning intently in the direction from which the sound had come—the stars were shining again now. ‘But it’s very thick yonder.’

‘Look! look! Captain Bridge,’ exclaimed Colin, whose eyes had been following Langdon’s glass—‘right away where the bell rang from, look at that light, sir!’

The look-out hailed the deck and reported the light at the same moment.

It was clearly visible. In colour a pale yellow, for

some seconds it glowed steadily, then for about an equal fraction of time it vanished, to reappear in mid-air—no longer steady, but swaying violently, as though shaken from side to side. Resolving itself into the shape of a



LOOK AT THAT LIGHT, SIR !'

globe, it fell out of sight with great velocity. With its disappearance—

'Ting—ting—ting—ting . . . ting—ting—ting . . . ting' rang the myterious bell again, in a long, irregular peal.

'It was a meteor,' said Dr. Hamilton.

'It certainly was neither an ordinary ship's light nor an ordinary blue light, burnt as a signal of distress,' agreed Bridge.

'Do meteors ring bells?' asked Langdon.

'I can't make out either the light or the bell,' said his superior officer, after a pause of puzzled reflection. 'Hoist a lantern, Mr Langdon, and burn blue lights for a quarter of an hour, if we don't get an answering signal sooner. It *must* be that some ship is in distress. If you make her out, bear down on her at once.'

'Ay, ay, sir'

Straining eyes watched the leeward horizon for the results of the signals of the *Iron Duke*, but in vain, all was dark and silent for fully half an hour.

Then the clouds that had been packed so darkly towards the north-east were seen slowly to move—lightning again tore them asunder, and low growls of thunder reverberated ominously. The barometer showed a greatly disturbed state of the atmosphere. The storm threatened to work round again.

Once more before the morning broke was the strange light seen—just after a particularly vivid flash of lightning. This time it showed a bluish tint, and moved in a straight line, at about the level of a ship's deck. Suddenly deepening in colour, it shot skyward

and vanished. The sound of no bell accompanied or followed this last apparition.

The forebodings of a possible return of the squall were dispelled. Crimsoning clear skies and calm waters in a gorgeous glow, the sun rose on another day.

Captain Bridge had retired. Down to him went the second mate to report that land was in sight, within half a point of the bearings of the strange sights and sounds of the departed night.

‘Land! Then we must have made more way during the squall than I calculated. Is there any sail in sight?’

‘No, sir. What we saw and heard must have come from the island we’ve just made out.’

‘Where away does it lie?’

‘East, sir—a point abaft the beam’.

‘I’ll come on deck.’

Captain Bridge reconnoitred the outline of the land, studied the chart, consulted the mate and first engineer, and took soundings.

Orders were given cautiously to approach the island and let go the anchors.

The ship was somewhat seriously, if not dangerously disabled, and the necessary repairs to her hull and machinery could best be effected in shoal water. They would take a considerable time.

'We'll bury poor Frost ashore, and afterwards take the opportunity of clearing up the mystery of the bell and the light,' said Bridge

Only now did the terribly sudden death of the kindly-natured first officer seem to be realised. In the double excitement of the storm, and what the sailors were already calling the 'ghost signals,' the thoughts of all had been engrossed, but now they turned to the poor scorched body that lay below.

At a distance of about a mile from the beach the anchors were dropped

Placed inside a rude coffin, which the carpenter had hastily put together, and over which had been thrown a Union Jack, the corpse was brought from below and let down into a boat alongside, which rowed slowly off for the shore .

Another boat took her place alongside, and into this stepped Langdon and a number of the crew

Harry Bridge, Hamilton, and some others were preparing to bring up the rear of the sad procession

'May I come with you, Captain Bridge?' asked Colin.

A ready assent was given, and he took his place in the stern-sheets. With every sweep of the even oars he—all unconscious—approached nearer to what Sam Sims would have called a 'climack' in his life

CHAPTER XXV

WHO TOLLED THE BELL?

‘THERE’LL be no fear of our friend’s resting-place being disturbed by unfriendly savages’

‘None, Hamilton,’ was the captain’s answer. ‘These small scattered islands in this ocean—there’s many another, besides this one, unmarked on any chart—are almost invariably uninhabited; and where there are natives they’re all friendly nowadays. Whatever the shortcomings of missionaries may have been in some parts, their work amongst the Pacific Islanders will always stand to their credit. I don’t say there can’t be anybody on this island in face of what we heard and saw last night, but I should be surprised to find natives living on it.’

‘Castaways?’

‘More likely, if anybody; but there’s not a sign of a single soul. Castaways would have rigged up a standing signal. Besides, they’d have been on the beach long ago.’

'Has no sort of possible explanation occurred to you?'

'Of last night's mystery? Yes, though my idea leaves a good deal unexplained, even if it's correct. You see that irregular range of hills that rises, say, a couple of miles from the beach, probably in about the middle of the island? Well, my idea is that off the coast on the other side of those hills is a ship that's accountable in some way for the bell we heard and the light we saw.'

'That's more likely than anything else I've heard suggested. However, it won't take long to explore the island, and we're bound to find something that will solve the riddle, and make us laugh at ourselves for having been so puzzled.'

Here the boat grated on the shingle, and the passengers disembarked. The occupants of the first two boats had already landed, and the bearers stood ready, with their burden, to move forward on the arrival of the captain, who, with the second mate on one side of him and Dr. Hamilton on the other, placed himself immediately behind the body, the other mourners quietly falling in at the rear.

All following his example, Captain Bridge removed his cap and gave the order to start.

For a short distance from the shore the land was flat

and almost bare of vegetation, but beyond this arid belt Nature was profuse in the display of her tropical beauties. The ground was carpeted with the greenest grass and the most brilliant flowers. Birds, whose dazzling plumage was scarcely brighter than the many-hued foliage from which they flew, approached the *cortège* so tamely that it was evident they had not learnt to fear the sight of man, which could only be—alas!—because they had not become familiar with the sight of him.

At a lovely spot, shadowed by the huge leaves of some thickly-growing trees, and hard by a dense thicket, the procession halted.

‘This will do,’ said Bridge. ‘Dig the grave here, close to the thickest trunk, so that we can carve his name on it.’

The coffin was rested on the blossom-spangled grass, and the grave made ready for it. Two ropes were noosed and slipped beneath it, head and foot.

‘Shall we lower, sir?’

‘Yes—No!’

Captain Bridge said the first word and shouted the second, for—

Clang! clang! clang!

Could mortal hands be tolling that loud, harsh, discordant burial-peal? Were human fingers ringing that

creaking bell, the sound of which smote their startled ears from the midst of the thicket close by'

There were brave men amongst those who heard it, who would have answered 'no', brave men, though now they looked at each other with frightened faces, brave men, who feared only the supernatural

'Hamilton,' said Bridge firmly, in a low voice, 'I shall delay the funeral till we've overhauled that copse, and, if necessary, the whole of the island I shall——'

Clang'

It was a fainter sound this time, and was followed by a 'clang' fainter still.

Leaving a guard of some half a dozen sturdy fellows over the body of the dead man, the rest of the party, led by the captain and the doctor, dashed into the thicket. Here they separated, in order that a thorough search might be made in as short a time as possible.

They emerged from it singly and in couples, and in companies of three and four. Not a man had anything to report—not one man had found anything to explain the ringing of the bell that every man had heard.

Reducing the body-guard to four men, the skipper split the rest of the landing party into five groups. Of one he gave the leadership to himself, of another to Hamilton, the third to Langdon, of the fourth to Brigson, the carpenter, a shrewd, quick-witted fellow.



COULD MORTAL HANDS BE TOLLING THAT LOUD, HARSH, DISCORDANT
BURIAL PEAL?—p. 217.

‘Colin, I know you’ve got a cool head on your shoulders, will you take charge of the fifth party?’

‘Yes, sir’

‘Very well, then, we can start. If there’s any mystery about this bell-ringing, light-burning island that can be solved, all we’ve got to do is to solve it. Each party will take a different direction, and return here when they have explored it. Between us, we’ve got to overhaul the whole place’

He gave a few more directions, and an immediate start was made, the request of Sam Sims, who had come ashore in the second boat, and found himself in the party under Mr Langdon’s charge, to ‘swop places’ with a member of Colin’s ‘little lot,’ being readily granted.

The captain’s contingent marched straight for the hills, on gaining which the coast on the other side, at about the same distance from the range as the coast they had left, lay before their eyes. A glance was sufficient to show that no ship lay in-shore or in the offing. A move on to the western beach was made without delay, and its entire length reconnoitred without a sign of human life being revealed.

Returning, several hours after setting out, No. 1 company met companies No. 2 and No. 5.

‘Nothing to report,’ announced Hamilton, disappointedly

'Nothing to report,' was also all that Colin had to say.

'Have you seen anything of the others?'

'No,' replied both

'Let's hope they've had better luck than any of us have had. If we don't meet them on the way, no doubt they'll be waiting for us at the grave. Let's push on'

In half an hour they reached the spot that all had started from in the morning

Half hidden in the high green grasses and tall flowers, there lay the coffin beside the open turf—unwatched, unguarded. The men who had been bidden to remain by it had fled—not a soul was in sight. And the bell was clanging again

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MYSTERY OF THE ISLAND

THE sound of loud and excited voices from the adjacent dense copse drew all eyes in its direction, from which came an instant return to Bridge's shouted hail, and out from the thicket rushed two of the four deserters from their post, dragging a ship's boy between them.

'We've found the bell, sir,' cried one of them, 'all along o' this here young warmint, though no credit to him whatsumdever. Now then, youngster, speak up, and spin your yarn to the cap'en'

'I came in the long-boat this morning, sir, and Mr Langdon told me to stop behind with another boy to mind the three boats when you all went fur'rud for the burying, sir. Soon me and the other boy thought we'd like some cocoanuts, so I left him to get some, and I crawled into this here forest without none of you a-spotting me, sir. I tried to shake the nuts down, but I could only get a little 'un here and there, so at last I climbed up a big tree, where I see some beauties

at the top. Just as I grabbed 'em the ghost's bell rung.'

'The what?'

'Beg yer pardon, sir, but I couldn't help thinking that was what it was. I heard some of the men say as ghosts was at the bottom of it all last night. A great bell rung, sir, though there wasn't nobody nigh to pull it, and no bell if there 'd been any number of people for to pull it! It give three claps on a line with my starb'd ear 'ole. I let go the nuts, and it began again. I was in such a hurry to get down that tree that I pretty nearly fell down. I scrambled out of the forest on the other side, too frightened even to 'oller, sir; but I stuck to the little nuts as I'd got first, and shared 'em with the other boy.'

'And by and by, sir,' said the sailor, taking up the story, 'he got up enough steam to come and tell us about the cocoanut tree that rung bells, and we made free to break orders so fur as to leave poor Mr. Frost, sir, and go investigationing. The boy couldn't spot the tree again for long enough, and we shook acres and oceans of trees before we hit on the right one. But when we did, sir, sure enough something like a bell rung when we stretched up and shook as near the top as we could reach.

'Then I shinned up myself, and as true as I'm

standing here there's a wire stretched. . . . But shall I take you to the place, cap'en? I chipped the bark all the way back, and I can pilot you there as c'rect as the compass. I was coming back when I heard you hail.'

'Lead the way,' was the sharp reply.

Without any difficulty the man conducted the entire party to the spot of which he had spoken, and pointed out the tree which first the lad and then he had climbed. Almost with the agility of a youngster, Bridge now went up it himself.

Round the trunk of this particularly tall tree, at the top, a thick wire had been made fast. Nearly to the farther fringe of the thicket, this wire was found to pass over the tops of some of the slightly shorter trees, and through the large leaves at the tops of others. It terminated in a sort of rude belfry, lashed and nailed—evidently with particular care that it should be strongly and securely fixed—to a tree-top on a lower level by some feet than the summit of the tree at the other end of the wire. In the belfry was suspended a large, age-rusty bell. In grabbing hold of the wire the boy had rung the bell.

'What on earth can be the meaning of such an arrangement as this?' asked Hamilton.

The words were scarcely out of his mouth when a bellowed cry was heard outside the wood.

'That's Brigson's voice,' said Bridge, after answering the hail. 'I fancy from the style of his shouting that he's made a find.'

Companies 3 and 4 had returned together.

'Well, Langdon?'

'It's the carpenter's report you want to hear, sir. I've come across nothing to report, except that there are caves at the northern extremity of the beach on this side.'

'What is it, carpenter?'

'We've found a hut in ruins, sir, in the midst of a clearing, in just such another bit o' forest as this here—this side of the hills to the south, not more than a mile away. We passed through the wood going without seeing anything of the hut, the undergrowth all round it is so thick; but coming back we beat about the wood again, and lighted on the shanty.'

'Any signs of recent occupation?'

'No, sir. The place must have been rigged up years ago, and I should say deserted years ago.'

After asking a few more questions the captain decided to proceed with the postponed funeral service before himself examining the carpenter's 'find.' He was, in fact, becoming anxious to get back to the ship to oversee the progress of the repairs.

The short, touching service of the Prayer-book for

the interment of the dead was quietly and reverently gone through, the grave filled up, and the turf neatly banked. Langdon and some of the men picked armfuls of the profusely growing flowers and covered all the mound. The carpenter had been busy in stripping the bark from the tree at the head of the grave, and cutting deep in the soft wood the name of the dead officer and the name of his ship.

Then Brigson piloted the way to the ruined hut, where a thorough search was made for anything which might throw a light upon the history of those who must have built it years ago, but nothing of the sort was found.

‘I can quite understand, carpenter, how it was that you missed this find the first time you passed through the wood,’ said Captain Bridge, with another look at the dense growth that surrounded the fallen timbers and tottering uprights. ‘And it strikes me that for the same reason we may have missed something similar in the thicket where the bell is.’

‘That’s likely enough,’ agreed Hamilton and Langdon.

‘We’ll beat through it again before we go aboard.’

By cutting away an even denser undergrowth the remains of another and apparently larger hut were discovered close to the hanging bell, but again the search for relics was quite unsuccessful.

The sun was now sinking low, and as nothing further remained to be done on the island, from which there were no castaways to be rescued, the three boats were pulled back to the ship, where the work of repairing had been actively carried on all day with the satisfactory result that her master was able to report to his anxious passengers that—work being carried on all through that night—she would be able to proceed on her voyage some time next day.

In the cool of the evening Captain Harry Bridge, Dr George Clarendon Hamilton, and Mr. Frederick Langdon, now first officer of the *Iron Duke*—to give the trio the benefit of their full names and respective dignities—were enjoying their cigars and coffee on the poop, and discussing the events of the day.

‘What’s your idea, captain,’ asked Hamilton, ‘as to the fate of the people who built these huts? It seems to me that they must have been put up by Europeans.’

‘They were—the native idea of a dwelling-place is something very different.’

‘The wood was native, wasn’t it?’

‘Yes, but the labour wasn’t. There’s no doubt but that some whites—probably a number of them, or they wouldn’t have wanted two huts—were cast away here years ago, and rescued years ago, leaving—of course, bar the huts—no durable traces behind them.’

‘Except the bell and the wire,’ said Langdon. ‘What could have been the motive for that lubberly arrangement?’

‘It puzzled me at first,’ began Bridge.

‘And puzzles me now,’ interrupted the doctor.

‘Well, I think I can explain it. Of course, there may have been another, and altogether different, reason for fixing up that wire attachment, but what has occurred to me is this: the bell—which no doubt, doctor, you noticed was a ship’s bell, by-the-bye—was hung so that when the winds were high enough its sound might serve as a signal of distress by night to any ship that was passing near enough to hear it.’

Langdon nodded.

‘That’s how we came to hear it last night; the shaking of the tree would itself be sufficient to move the clapper. We never heard it *once again after the wind died right away*. But about the wire?’

‘I was coming to that. After comparing the direction in which it had been laid, from the belfry to the other end, with the original lines of the hut that stood near it, I came to the conclusion that it had been rigged up as a rather rough and ready lightning conductor.’

‘But there’s no wire running to the earth!’

‘There may have been,’ was the unanswerable answer.

‘At all events,’ said Hamilton, ‘the two phenomena

of last night are explained. The bell-ringing mystery clears itself up, so to speak; and as for the antics of the light that so perplexed us, they are accounted for by the action of the fluid electricity on the wire, in the charged state of the atmosphere.'

'I don't quite see that,' remarked Langdon. Because he had not known in his own personal experience of similar results from similar causes, he was disposed to question the soundness of the other's theory, and a discussion of some length ensued between them, the mate arguing from what he knew and had experienced—or rather from what he did not know and had not experienced—and the doctor from his scholastic knowledge of the possibilities involved in the undisputed circumstances. With him undoubtedly rested the honours of the debate.

'Any way, Langdon,' said Bridge, 'if Hamilton has failed to convince you that his explanation is the correct one—as it certainly is—can you give us any other?'

'I certainly cannot,' replied the mate candidly. 'But I tell you what: I should be curious to see how the doctor's scientific theory would go down with the fo'c'sle hands. I'm open to wager that it wouldn't drive out of their heads the idea that ghosts, or something uncanny, were at the bottom of the lights mystery, if they

hadn't something to do with the bell-ringing I overheard some of their remarks to-day.'

'So did I,' said the captain, who was rather tickled at Langdon's idea of confronting them with a scientific demonstration 'Call a couple of them up'

The mate left the poop for a few minutes, and returned with the oldest two salts on board. Bridge chatted with them in a free and easy manner about the strange signals, and then the doctor slipped in with his elucidation—long words and technical phrases included. The tars listened respectfully, but it was obvious that they neither understood his language nor accepted his dictum.

'I could do with five shillings' worth o' some o' them crackjaw words, sir,' said one of them, with a twinkle of humour in his sly old eye, 'but—but—it won't wash, sir.'

'Well, what's *your* idea?'

'There's some things as is better not spoke of too free,' was the decidedly shifty reply. However, the fact was gradually established that, at least in the minds of the two fo'c'sle hands under interrogation, there was an undefined connection between the 'signals' and the death of Mr Frost, in the sense that they were an intimation to bury him ashore.

'There's something very rummy about that island

as had better not be spoke too free about,' was a sentiment in which they both concurred

'I've done, Langdon,' said Hamilton with a smile. 'Notwithstanding your lingering doubts—if you have any—and the very entertaining scepticism of our two friends here, I've explained everything. The mystery of the island is solved.'

'Yes,' laughed Bridge 'The mystery of the island is solved.'

Was it? *Was it?*—for *from* the island—the uninhabited island!—came echoing over the water, as the words were uttered, the sound of three gun-shots, fired in rapid succession.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE BRUSH IN THE BUSH

P'R'APS it was your elecktrickity as fired them shots, sir ?'

No notice was taken of the superstitious old salt's remark save Captain Bridge's sharp 'Were they fired by a ghost ?' accompanied by a gesture that sent him and his messmate off the poop to rejoin their fellows.

In a moment the hitherto quiet deck, on which the majority of those on board not engaged in the repairs had been listlessly lounging, was the scene of wild bustle and commotion. The workers left their work, the early sleepers their bunks, and came tumbling up.

A fourth shot, a fifth, and after a longer interval a sixth. And this time the flash of all three discharges was seen on the beach below the first thicket. It was assumed that a boat would be immediately sent ashore. The men stood in readiness, waiting for the expected orders.

But it soon appeared that it was not within the immediate purpose of their commander to give those

orders. For several minutes he gave none. Ordinarily a man of lucid thought and rapid resolution—almost as quick to act as to decide how to act—for once he hesitated; for the contingencies to be taken into account could not be calculated—could scarcely even be guessed.

‘Langdon,’ he said at length quietly, ‘when the moon clears I shall send a boat ashore again—and not before.’

‘Very good, sir—with how large a party?’

‘As many men may go as we can send armed. No man is to go unarmed.’

‘Very good, sir,’ said Langdon again. ‘I suppose I am to go in charge of the party?’

He looked very pleased at the prospect of taking a party ashore prepared to fight—though with whom, or what about, it was impossible to fathom at present.

‘Yes. You’d better see how far what arms we can muster will go round. Stay a moment—I’ll come with you. Of course, you can take my pistols yourself.’

It was found that besides the captain, doctor, and officers, several of the passengers had revolvers. Half-a-dozen fowling-pieces were also available, and a larger number of bladed weapons. Ammunition for the fire-arms was plentiful. Altogether, arms of some sort were served out to some twenty willing men, whose impatience was increased by their possession of them.

The sky was watched by keen and longing eyes.

The clouds were slowly rolling from the face of the slowly-rising moon. The boat hung in the davits ready for the word.

Just before it was given, Colin, with Sam in tow, approached the captain with a similar request to the one he had made before the starting of the morning party.

‘May we go too, sir?’

But this time the answer was in the negative.

‘Mr. Langdon?’

‘Yes, sir.’

He received a few final instructions, and then—

‘Lower away, my men.’

The boat dipped without a splash, her waiting complement were in their seats in a twinkling, and she was under full way for the beach in a couple of strokes, followed by every eye on deck. Within view she gained the shingle and was hauled up. The whole party moved up the beach towards the thicket.

‘Easy, all,’ cried Langdon. ‘Footprints!’ This is just about the spot where we saw the flashes.’

‘This way they lead, sir—towards the wood,’ exclaimed Brigson.

Towards the wood, in the trail of the footprints, the advance was continued, after a careful examination which clearly showed a double track.

‘But these are the footmarks of only one man.’

'And that man has dived into the jungle, Langdon,' said Hamilton, alongside of him 'Why not try a hail before we pursue him any farther?'

The party were now close to the seaward fringe of the jungle. The mate called a halt, and a united hail was given, loud enough to be heard over almost half the island.

Every ear was alert in the silence after that stentorian challenge. It was a silence of only a few moments, broken by a loud, shrill cry or scream. Some unintelligible words followed the cry in the same thin, high key.

A strange look settled on the faces of all the listening crowd as from man to man passed the words—

'It's a woman!'

'Hark again!' exclaimed Langdon. 'Silence!'

The crackling sound of moving branches in two directions was distinctly heard from the thicket.

'Come on,' he shouted, and in they dived, scrambling or stumbling over the undergrowth, for little or no light penetrated through the top growth.

'Halt! Light the lanterns.'

Before the order could be obeyed by those who carried them, those who did not plunged on ahead. In a moment the scattered sailors found themselves between two fires. A rifle was ping-pinging on their

left from about the point where the woman-voice had been raised, and small shot from several guns was tearing through the leaves on their right, from which quarter the fusillade had commenced.

Langdon's voice rose hoarsely above the uproar, but his men had lost their heads. To be fired on by unseen shooters from two sides without knowing why was too much. Those of them who had firearms did what any such men—save (possibly) men broken in to military discipline—would have done ~~at~~ in similar circumstances. They blazed away to left and right at their own discretion.

A scream—was it the woman's scream?—from the former direction; a yell of agony from the latter—and all the firing ceased.

Langdon's efforts to get his men in hand were futile, although on board these very fellows who now acted independently of him would have waited for his every word, and been amenable to his nod.

Somebody shouted that two figures were breaking away to the right—helter-skelter started off some of the seamen in pursuit. Half of them came to a dead stop by the side of a wounded man writhing in the grass; the other half went on.

Langdon and Hamilton, with an accidental rather than an obedient following, rushed to the left. Here

they stumbled over the body of another wounded man. The mate snatched a lantern and held it over the twitching face. The doctor knelt by the fallen sufferer's side and lifted his head.

'Thank Heaven, it isn't a woman after all,' murmured a husky voice.

'He's dead, whoever he is,' said Hamilton, laying the poor head gently on the grass.

But he wasn't quite dead, though he died in a few moments. As he breathed his last he opened his eyes and uttered two words in a voice that might well have been mistaken for the voice of a woman or a child.

'British subject!' he said.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AFTER THE SKIRMISH

A ROCKET went up from the ship
‘We’ve got to return. Where are those men?’
cried Langdon with an angry gesture.

Up shot a second rocket.

‘No! The captain’s coming ashore. Brigson, and you men there with that other lantern, just take another good look round, and then we’ll go down to the beach and meet him’

‘There was nobody else on this side,’ said Hamilton, touching the still hot rifle by the side of the dead Chinaman; ‘at least, there was only this one rifle at work.’

At this moment one of the men from the group round the other victim came hurrying up to fetch the doctor to him. Hamilton left with the sailor at once. In a few minutes the others stood on the shore awaiting the approaching gig bearing the captain to the scene of action. This time Colin had slipped in amongst the crew, with whom, keeping himself as much out of

evidence as possible, he quietly stepped ashore as the keel of the boat grated on the sands

In as few words as possible Langdon explained what had taken place, so far as what had taken place could be explained. From the spot where poor Chang-To had fallen Bridge made his way across the actual scene of the 'engagement' to where the man on the right had fallen

'He's not dead, sir,' said Dr. Hamilton, 'but he seems to be badly wounded, and he's fainted. He's been hit here in the right breast, I think the wound's a rifle wound.'

'If so,' said Langdon, 'this is the work of one of our own men—all the fire from across yonder came from a single Martini-Henry.'

'I was just giving instruction, captain, to have him carefully moved down to the boat to be taken on board'

'Let the doctor's orders be carried out at once, Mr Langdon. Superintend them yourself'

From the lips of Colin Casselden—as he gazed intently at the white face on the ground—burst a bewildered cry of amazement

'Captain Bridge,' he exclaimed wildly, 'don't you see who this man is? Look at him—he's the man who boarded us from the sham police-boat off Mauritius, and arrested Gregory Purdyke!'

The interjection of incredulity that broke in one breath from Bridge, Hamilton, and Langdon was checked in an instant, for, bending over him, they cried—

‘He is the man!’



‘CAPTAIN BRIDGE,’ HE EXCLAIMED WILDLY, ‘DON’T YOU SEE WHO THIS MAN IS?’

Shouts were heard from the beach as from a body of moving men. The sailors who had pelted off in chase of the two runaways who had been seen to bolt from the wood were returning.

‘Brigson—and you, you and you—bring this man

down to the boat. Mr. Langdon, come with me now, please. Follow us, everybody else.'

'We've copped 'em, sir,' cried the returning sailors as they caught sight of their captain. 'They was making for the caves when we run 'em down. Here they are, sir.'

The two men they were hauling along with them were identified almost at once

'This is the plain-clothes man who came aboard with the other beauty,' said Bridge, pointing to the man we know as Brown

'And this,' exclaimed Langdon, pointing to the man we know as Robinson, 'is the second fellow in uniform who remained on board the launch. I had a good view of him before she cleared off.'

'All aboard'' was Captain Bridge's order. 'This astounding affair, Langdon,' he added aside, 'can't be gone into here.'

'No, sir. I suppose we're to treat these two fellows as prisoners.'

'Of course'

'Are we to bring the dead Chinaman on board?'

'Take him in your boat, and leave the boat alongside for the present.'

'All right, sir.'

Jones, still unconscious, was taken off in the gig,

and, when the ship was reached, immediately carried below, where he was left in Hamilton's hands. Brown and Robinson were brought before the captain in his own cabin for interrogation

They sullenly refused to answer a single question.

'Very well, Langdon. Put these two bashful gentlemen in irons, and keep them in them without food or drink till they pluck up courage to speak.'

'By what right do you give such orders?' demanded the prisoners.

'It's enough for me—and you, too—that I possess the *power* to give them and have them obeyed. At present, I exercise that power on my own responsibility. March them off, Mr. Langdon, and send Dr. Hamilton to me as soon as he can leave his patient.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

Brown and Robinson were promptly escorted to the 'tween-decks, and put in irons and confinement.

In compliance with the summons he had received, at the end of about a quarter of an hour the doctor entered the cabin.

'Well, Hamilton?'

'The man has regained complete consciousness. I don't think he's in any particular pain now, and he's quite calm.'

'Will he live?'

‘No.’

‘Can he speak?’

‘Yes, and collectedly His mind is quite clear’

‘How long will he last?’

‘I should say through the night, but certainly not over to-morrow’

‘Does he know?’ asked Bridge after a pause

‘He may feel that he is going—people often do with just such wounds—but I haven’t told him’

‘Then will you do so, quite plainly? His unmistakable knowledge of the fact won’t make the fact itself any worse, and it may dispose him to make a clean breast of all we want to know By-the-bye, have you extracted the bullet?’

The other shook his head

‘I haven’t even probed far for it What would be the use? He’d die under my hands if I attempted its extraction. I suppose after I’ve told him there’s no hope for him, you’ll want to submit him to an examination of a different sort from mine?’

‘Yes, immediately, if you consider the present a fitting time?’

‘There can’t be a fitter one before the end comes What did you get out of the other two?’

‘Nothing They wouldn’t reply to anything I asked them.’

'I fancy you won't find my patient so obstinate'—and the physician left the cabin to fulfil the last duty that fell to his office.

Jones's eyes were open as he approached the bed. Fixing them on his visitor he asked, with a slight shiver of his frame but without any trembling of his low voice—

'Have you come to tell me?'

'Yes.'

'You needn't. I know it's all over with me. How long have I got?'

An answer was returned similar to that just before given to the same question.

'If you have anything on your mind or conscience —'

'I have a good deal on my mind. I have no conscience. I sold it to the Prince of Darkness long ago—and the bargain I made has turned out a bad one in the long-run.'

'I'm not a parson, and it's no part of my duty to talk to you like one; but I tell you—whoever you are—that no man ever succeeded in getting rid of his conscience yet. No man ever made a bargain with Satan yet without getting bested in the end. Though he may not play it for long enough, the Devil keeps the ace of trumps up his sleeve for the last deal.

I'm not very old, but I've seen all sorts of people die in all sorts of circumstances, and I've never seen any conscious man or woman die yet without showing a conscience—either at peace or not at peace. If you can do anything to ease yours against its last awakening, you'd better do it. The captain of this ship is coming to you directly—you've met him before, you'll find—and you'd better think over what I've been saying before he comes'

It was impossible to tell from the look of the wounded man's face how he was affected. He closed his eyes, and seemed to be thinking.

Then he asked an unexpected question.

'Is young Casselden on board? I suppose not?'

'He is,' returned Hamilton shortly.

'I won't inquire how he comes to be on board still—it doesn't matter. Answer me two more questions, and you can send in the captain when you like. I've made up my mind what to do.'

'What are the questions?' was asked him rather impatiently.

'Who shot me? I should want to ask a good many questions—if it mattered, you know—as to what you were all up to on the island to-night, but it doesn't matter. But I do want to know who shot me, if you can tell from the wound I'm dying from.'

Without troubling, now, about why they shot at all, what did your fellows shoot with? A mad Chinaman was firing at us with a Martini-Henry——'

'All I can tell you is that you were hit with a rifle bullet—of course, not in the true line of fire, or it would have gone through you at such a short distance; but I should say with a ricocheted ball. Several of our men—who all fired without orders—carried rifles besides the Chinaman, so I can't answer you.'

'Then you fell against the Chinaman?' exclaimed Jones more eagerly, though his voice was not raised any higher. 'Was he shot? That's my last question.'

'He was—dead!—by one of our men with a pistol.'

'I wish I could have been assured that I shot him myself; but it's a relief to know that somebody killed him. I shall die easier for it. Now, then, the captain can come and put me through my paces when he likes.'

When Bridge entered, Hamilton returned with him, and he was accompanied also by Langdon and Colin.

'Whatever we may be able to get out of this man, my boy, you certainly have a right to hear it at first hand,' the captain had said to him

The doctor went to the head of the berth, Colin to the foot; the other two stood between them. The

doomed man gave no trouble, beyond exacting a certain pledge before he would open his lips to make the communication all were so anxious to listen to.

'Doctor,' he said, 'I've been thinking since you left me that dying men do sometimes recover. Don't they?'

'*You* won't,' was the firm, unhesitating reply.

'Then there's so much less reason for anybody'—he said 'anybody,' but looked at the captain—'to object to my receiving the pledge I want before I speak. I know all you want to know, and I'll tell you—for it doesn't matter,' he repeated 'That is, it doesn't matter if I die, but it would matter a great deal if I don't die.'

'*You will* die.'

'But *if* I don't, doctor—you talked like a priest just now, so perhaps you believe in miracles—*if* I don't, I want a solemn pledge from every one of you that you won't give me up. I want an undertaking that I shall be dropped at some port on the way without a word to the authorities. Make what use you like of what I tell you, after you've given me a chance to get away—the first chance that offers. Captain Bridge, it's for you to speak first.'

'If there's the slightest possibility of your living I refuse to give any pledge of any sort.'

‘There is no possibility whatever of his living beyond to-morrow,’ reiterated Dr. Hamilton with terrible plainness.

He added a few words earnestly aside to Bridge, who then said, looking into the face of the man to whom he pledged his never-dishonoured word—

‘As master of this ship, I give you the pledge you ask.’

‘So far as I am concerned,’ said Hamilton readily, ‘I give you that pledge also.’

‘And I also,’ said Langdon.

‘And I also,’ said Colin, last

‘Then I’ll speak’

CHAPTER XXIX

MAROONED !

JONES began by stating that his name was Alfred Beattie Greyling, and by particularising the association of himself and George Turberton and Septimus Farmer ('Brown' and 'Robinson,' of whose presence on board he had been made aware) with Gregory Purdyke in a number of frauds, discovered and undiscovered, in the City of London, culminating in their at first successful partnership in the Industrial affair.

There is no need to give Greyling's story in his own words, or even in his own detail. We can take up the facts from the point where he, Turberton, and Farmer had handed over their own leader to the commander of H.M.S. *Felix*. This *coup* to get rid of him and at the same time of his claim upon a major portion of the booty—which, it will be remembered, originated from Greyling's brain—having been successfully accomplished, the absorbing aim of the conspirators was to get out of the way with all possible speed.

'If the captain of the man-o'-war listens to what Purdyke will have to say, Tamatave or its neighbourhood will be too hot to hold us. At the very least we shall be detained until inquiries can be made, and those inquiries can only end in one way. If the captain of the *Cameroon* is appealed to when she comes up, he'll soon blow the gaff on our report that we received *both* prisoners from his hands.'

This reasoning was undoubtedly sound, and the conclusion inevitable.

They got away from the side of the *Felix* with feverish haste and steered ashore. This they were almost bound to do for the sake of appearances, whatever their ultimate plans might be. Without leaving the launch, they continued the heated discussion of what those plans should be. Greyling began to be sorry that the scheme of delivering up Purdyke as well as his innocent partner had ever occurred to him.

'It knocks the idea of getting up country on the head,' he cried; 'for that dodge, of course, Purdyke will put them up to.'

'We're in a nice mess,' groaned Turberton. 'One thing is certain, and that is that we can't stop here. At any moment they may come for us from the man-o'-war, or a boat may arrive for us from Mauritius. There's nothing for it, after all, but our first idea of

putting out to sea and taking our chance of being picked up.'

'That's what I tried to stand out for at the beginning,' growled Farmer, 'but Purdyke would have his own way, and you, Grayling, backed him up.'

'Talk of the present and leave the past alone.'

'Very well, then; I say with Turberton that there's only one thing we *can* do, whatever its risks. Out we go for the track of ships.'

'What about the Chinaman and the other fellow?'

'Ranavo will go anywhere and do anything rather than land where the French are; and as for Chang, he must be bullied or bribed—or both. We can't do without them and we don't want any more ructions with them.'

'By Heaven! look out there—there's the smoke of a steamer from the bay of Mauritius now!'—and Turberton pointed his trembling hand seaward.

A frenzy of fear seized all three. Without another word the discussion was considered as at an end. Grayling rushed ashore and purchased such provisions as he could lay his hands on, Turberton saw to a renewal of the water-supply, Farmer cajoled Chang-To by paying him his bribe of twenty dollars, promising him more, and assuring him they were about to return whence they had started

'You don't understand, Chang-To; we've finished what we were obliged to take the boat in order to do. We've altered our plans, and now we're going back to explain everything and return the launch.'

'Large piecee work explain evelything,' remarked Chang-To sagely and significantly, as he chinked his money.

Without the waste of a moment's time the *Prairie Flower* got away

Frightened eyes looked from her towards the steamer that had been seen approaching Tamatave, within hail of which the launch had to pass in clearing the port. Every moment it was feared that a challenge would ring out from her deck. But she was only a trader, and passed peacefully on her way. Even then it was feared that she might reverse her course and come in pursuit

The *Prairie Flower* got away, but only just in time, for the arrival of the *Cameroon* was followed by that of a boat that *did* carry police from Port Louis.

When it became evident that Mauritius was *not* to be returned to, Chang-To headed another attempt at mutiny, but a careful combination of intimidation, bribery and cajolery, combined with a never-sleeping vigilance, was successful in keeping both him and the Hova in subjection and 'in hand.'

Far out in the Indian Ocean—provisionless and almost a wreck—the launch crossed the bows of the clipper schooner *White Wings*, bound for Java. The ‘shipwrecked pleasure party, driven out to sea by stress of weather,’ were taken on board, and the launch was abandoned to her fate.

The master of the *White Wings* was a man of Portuguese birth or extraction. He was an old blockade runner—quick-witted, reckless, unscrupulous. The clipper he commanded was his own. He had bought her with blood-money, made in the slave-trade. Under him, she was chiefly engaged in the South Sea Island trade—the voyage that had taken her to the Indian Ocean was an exceptional one.

Before arriving at Java (where Ranavo, by-the-bye, took himself off without troubling himself to go through the formality of saying good-bye to anybody), this old Jago the Portuguese had the three Englishmen under his thumb. Too wary to express the first suspicions he formed as he compared the story told by them with the luggage they had taken with them on their ‘pleasure trip,’ he confirmed those suspicions by various shrewd and altogether dishonourable artifices.

As soon as he was certain of his ground, he gave them the option of ‘making a clean breast of it’ or forfeiting their belongings. When they chose the

former alternative (with mental limitations), he said he only wanted to do the fair thing, and would be satisfied with his fourth share, provided they agreed that no distribution should take place until, under his management, the total sum to be divided had been at least doubled by trading in the Pacific and South Sea. He described the life of ease and indulgence they could live at Samoa or one of the other islands in its glorious region, far away from the restraints of civilisation—and the police.

Not altogether reluctantly they fell in with his proposal. Chang-To—who by this time appeared to have quite forgotten the existence of his ‘small piece of gal’ at Port Louis—had no objection to raise to the proposal that he should accompany his new masters to Samoa as their body-servant.

Had the winds been under his own control, Jago could not have made quicker way. In all his experience, his run *to* Java—where the schooner only stayed for an hour or two—was only beaten by his run *from* it up to almost the time of the squall which had damaged the *Iron Duke*. Made surly by the dropping of the wind, he came to words with his ‘partners.’

Unfortunately for them, something was dropped in the course of the altercation that roused his ever-ready suspicions. This time he suspected that, however ‘clean

a breast of it' the bank thieves had made in the main, they had understated the value of the treasure they had with them. Taking violent measures to verify his suspicions, they *were* verified.

His revenge found vent in a form which would probably never even have suggested itself to a younger man, to so old a custom was it a reversion. Throwing in the unfortunate Chang-To with his masters as a suspicious associate, he marooned the lot, and sailed away with the entire 'capital of the firm.'

'He made for the accursed island where some of you shot me to-night—he seemed to know something of the place.'

Greyling's voice was weaker now, and his utterance more laboured. Hamilton silently administered a draught, which seemed to have an almost instantly reviving effect.

'It wasn't far off. The day before the squall—the day before yesterday—he rowed us up on the tide into the cave, and left us there, with some stores and fire-arms—nothing else. It was no use to think of resisting; he had twenty or thirty men at his back, who'd have killed us at his nod. He'd have killed us himself if it hadn't been for his conceit.'

'His conceit!'

'Yes. He reckoned there was no need to kill us

because he was so smart that if he only got a week's start he could baffle anybody to run him down before he'd stowed the money away in some secure place, or



'HE ROWED US INTO THE CAVE, AND LEFT US THERE'

got rid of it, for a good equivalent, in some safe way'

He turned his eyes—they were beginning to glaze a little—to the face of Harry Bridge. The captain, too, had his eyes occupied with the changing face of Greyling, from what he saw, he feared the story might never be ended

'At dawn to-day I saw your ship. I was overjoyed—till I recognised her. We all agreed that we'd better not be rescued at all than be rescued by you, we'd better spend our lives where we were than in prison. At all events, we'd take our chance of another ship turning up, even if it didn't come for years. So we agreed to lie low till you had sailed away, and to hide in our caves in case you came ashore. We all agreed but the mad Chinaman—of course he wanted to signal you. We kept him with us by force all day, but when night came he found a chance and bolted.

'He took one of our guns with him—the only rifled one we had—and some cartridges. His first shots were to signal you, but we heard them also and turned out after him, and saw him dodge into the wood. We couldn't locate him for a long time, but when we did—we knew you were coming—we opened fire on him, and he blazed away at us. Your fellows dashed into the jungle so suddenly that they got between the cross-fires, and then they took up the shooting themselves.'

Again a restorative was held to Greyling's lips as he finished.

'Does anybody want to know anything more?'

Bridge asked a few nautical questions regarding the *White Wings*, which were answered as fully as the landsman's knowledge enabled him to speak.

‘Have you anything more to ask?’

‘No.’

‘Nor I,’ said Langdon and Hamilton in turn, in reply to the glance directed first at one and then at the other.

‘I have,’ said Colin firmly.

‘I know who you are, and what you want to ask me about. Your father is as innocent as you are; and face to face with Purdyke and the two others, he’ll be able to prove it.’

Going back to the beginning of his long statement, he told how he had himself written and posted the letter which would account for Casselden’s known journey to Southampton. That letter was the first link in the chain, so to speak, that ended at present at Tamatave—the few missing links it would not be difficult to find.

To Colin’s mind the explanation of that flight from London to the southern port seemed a key that would fit all locks. A great well of thankful emotion gushed up into his eyes from his swelling heart. He thought—thought gratefully—of Captain Bridge’s confident words weeks ago—‘The pocket-book contained a clue.’

But he could look no longer on the face of this man who had participated so actively in the villainy of which his father had been the victim—his father, his mother, himself. All that this man was, his father had been

branded as being. His tardy confession entitled him to no pity, for it was made when contumacy would have availed him nothing.

No, he could look no longer upon that crafty face—though it was the face of a dying man. He turned and left the cabin.

CHAPTER XXX

‘SAIL HO!’

GREYLING died an hour after day-break. Almost at the same moment the chief engineer and the carpenter reported the completion of all the repairs in their respective departments.

The ship was ready to proceed.

‘Get up steam instantly, Mr. Sharpe,’ said the captain to the chief engineer. ‘And be prepared to get out of her all she can do for the next day or two’

‘What about the bodies, sir?’ asked Langdon.

‘They will be buried at sea this afternoon.’

Greyling and poor little Chang-To were committed to the deep at the same time.

While the haunting memory of the double splash of their bodies into the sea was fresh in his ears, Colin was asked to step into the chart-house, where he found Langdon closeted with the skipper.

‘Colin,’ said the latter, ‘I am deviating from my strictly proper course in the hope of running against the *White Wings*. She must have caught the squall

that knocked us about so, and likely enough it has clipped her wings, I'm hopeful of overhauling her, but I'm less hopeful of being able to do any good if I do. Only by main force, which I daren't attempt to use, could I do what I should like to do.'

'Search Jago's ship for the money, you mean, Captain Bridge?'

'Exactly. I haven't the least right or authority—not by any stretch—to try on anything of that sort.'

'I can quite see that,' said Colin mournfully. He followed up the admission by some warm-hearted words of thanks for the fresh proof he was receiving of Bridge's unselfish and more than friendly interest but these were cut short.

'So what I've been discussing with Mr. Langdon is a bit of stratagem. I interviewed those men—Turberton and Farmer—again this morning; and now that they know, of course, of Greyling's confession last night, they'd do anything to lay this Jago by the heels. They'd rather that all this money that he stole from them should find its way back to the hands of those *they* helped to steal it from first than that it should remain in his. Well, if we could decoy this wily Portuguese on board and confront him with these two fellows, my idea is that he might feel like disgorging

the lot rather than be charged with its criminal possession'

'If you gave an undertaking that he shouldn't be charged,' hesitated Colin, 'mightn't you—because I know if you once gave your word, in any circumstances, you'd stick to it, and in this case would refuse the information you'd be called upon to give—mightn't you get into trouble?'

'I'd chance that In fact, all I could engage to do would be not to split until I was obliged to, because, as he'd know well enough, my log could be taken. But by that time he wouldn't have much to fear, for where would be the prosecutors? Whereas, when he knew what we know, he'd be quite sure that both himself and the money would be wanted at almost any port he could put into, as soon as I could communicate my intelligence to the police.'

The force of this argument was convincing, and Colin's heart beat high at the mere prospect, the bare hope, of the recovery of the twice-stolen wealth

'There's nobody on board,' he declared, 'who'll keep a sharper look-out for the clipper than I will By-the-bye, sir, how do you stand as regards those men, Turberton and Farmer? What's your position as regards making prisoners of them?'

Bridge laughed.

'They're not my prisoners. On the contrary, I believe they could lodge a legal complaint against me for my treatment of them last night. But though they're not my prisoners, they're aboard my ship, and I can—and will—take precious good care that they're somebody else's prisoners when they leave it.'

It soon became known on board that what was called a 'chase' was in hand, and excitement raged high—higher still when the rumour spread—somehow—that 'a hundred thousand pounds' were at stake. Before evening the amount had swollen to half a million.

'Ere's another climack!' said Sam

Very reluctantly Colin sought his bunk that night, fearing that the *White Wings* might be sighted while he slept. Late as it was when he retired, he was up long before the peep-o'-day showed in the sky.

Short as had been his interval of rest, during the period he had concocted, and decided upon carrying out, a plan of his own to circumvent Jago in the event of the captain's plan failing.

When Sam Sims made his appearance, about a couple of hours later than his own, he confided his new scheme to him with all the zest with which it had inspired himself. Sam was intensely sympathetic, but 'took aback' by its audacity and its dangers; but the lad would listen to no objections, no warning.

'My mind's made up, Sam,' he said. 'It's for my father, for my mother, and for hundreds of others. If the captain's dodge fails, I shall try on mine. My mind's made up.'

'I know it is. I can always tell when you've took the bit between the teeth by the look of yer. But ain't you rather a-cahntin' of your chickens before they're 'atched? We ain't caught up this 'ere *White Wings* yut, and maybe we sha'n't.'

'Maybe we sha'n't,' agreed Colin with a sigh.

As he spoke he scanned the horizon all round. No sail was in sight.

The morning passed, and the afternoon. Evening came, and again the night fell. No sail had been sighted all the time; no smoke of steamer or mast of sailing-ship. But at dawn—

'Sail ho!'

Up tumbled almost everybody on board—captain, mate, doctor, Colin and Sam first in the rush.

'Where away?' shouted Bridge before he gained the deck.

'On the port-bow, sir.'

Almost within hailing distance was a jury-rigged schooner.

Taking the glass from the second mate—the officer of the watch—the master of the *Iron Duke* was

endeavouring to make out the stranger's name when—

‘Turberton and Farmer are in the chart-house, sir, where they can see without being seen’

With a hasty ‘Thank you, Mr Langdon,’ he turned eagerly towards the chart-house

‘Is that schooner the *White Wings*?’ he asked the two within

‘Yes.’

CHAPTER XXXI

COLIN'S PLUCKY PLAN

BY Jove! we're in luck—just the very opportunity we wanted,' cried Captain Bridge as a signal of distress went fluttering up to the mainmast-head of the *White Wings*.

Tick-tick went the order to Mr. Sharpe to slacken speed.

Slowly and awkwardly under her jury-rigged masts the schooner wore up to the steamer and lay-to.

'Stop her,' ticked the telegraph, and the *Iron Duke* came to a standstill.

The usual hails passed between the two ships, those from the schooner coming from the strong lungs of a tall, thin man, whom Bridge took to be Jago until Turberton undeceived him.

'That fellow is not the Portuguese.'

'Who is he, then?'

'Jago's second in command—an American named Haslar. He was the only man who stood out against our being marooned.'

'What can we do for you?' shouted Bridge.

'Our fresh water is all bilgod: will yew let us have some of yours?' drawled the other.

'We haven't too much ourselves,' parleyed the Englishman, to gain time. He was thinking of the best excuse the circumstances afforded for requiring or requesting the skipper of the schooner to come aboard.

'I guess yew can condense as much as yew like.'

'Are you the master of that schooner?'

'No—*sir*. The old man is bad below.'

'I want to see him.'

'I guess yew can't, unless yew come aboard.'

'What's the matter with him?'

'Knocked up during a heavy squall four nights ago. Our sticks were blown out, and we haven't got 'em up again yet. What dew yew want with him, anyhow?'

'I can't explain till I see him. But if he's ill, and will come aboard, our doctor shall overhaul him.'

'Wall, I'll send down to him, but I calculate he won't stir for yew.'

Bridge turned to Langdon.

'Surely he can't smell a rat?'

'I should think not, sir; but it's impossible to be sure.'

'Hi! yew there'—came from the Yankee after a couple of minutes.

‘Well!’

‘The old man sends yew his compliments, and he’s real sorry to say that he’s too drunk to board yew,’ was the polite but extraordinary message now conveyed through the American mate’s lips—or, to be more accurate, through his nose. ‘Will yew let us have that water, boss? I’ll send a boat alongside yew for it.’

‘Hold hard! I’ll see what we can spare.’

For ten minutes the disappointed Bridge tried every expedient that his own ingenuity or that of his officers could suggest to tempt the master of the *White Wings* to come aboard the steamer, but all in vain.

‘Is he really ill, really drunk, or really afraid?’ was the question.

‘You are certain that neither Turberton nor Farmer can have been observed from the schooner?’

‘Positive, sir,’ replied the mate. ‘I had them taken below, as you ordered, soon after they’d identified her.’

‘Well, whatever’s the reason, the fact remains—he won’t come aboard. As the mountain won’t come to Mahomet, Mahomet will go to the mountain. Mr. Langdon, get a couple of casks of water alongside. I’ll go in the boat myself, with you and Hamilton, and see what I can make of this fellow. I can’t bear the idea of his slipping through our fingers, but I don’t see any help for it.’

'We may be able to worm out of him where he's really bound for now.'

'That's about all we can hope to do, I'm afraid; and if he's been cautious enough to fix on a second port instead of his first, he'll be quite foxy enough to name a third one for our bamboozlement. However, we'll board him and try to take his soundings. Ready with the boat, please.'

'Ay, ay, sir.'

'Stand by, you on the schooner there. I'm sending you the water, and coming aboard you with it myself.'

'All right, boss. I'll go and shake up the old man.'

'Colin, I wish it were possible to do more than you've just heard me propose to do. I can't put things plump and plain before this Jago on his own ship unless I'm prepared to board him in force and fight my way off it. I daren't give him a hint of what we know, or he'd take good care that none of his stolen pile could be found on the schooner when the time might come for searching her.'

'I can see all that, captain. I think I can see everything; I've thought it all over hard enough. You can do nothing more at present than you're going to do. *You* can do nothing more, sir; but *I can*.'

'How?' asked Bridge incredulously.

'Boat's ready, sir—and here comes the doctor.'

'All right, Langdon. Now, Colin'—as Hamilton joined the three—'let's hear what you have to say.'

'It's just this, Captain Bridge. Aboard that schooner is the money of people who trusted my father. It's his money in trust for them. He'd have died rather than betray that trust. I'm going to be the means of restoring to him every shilling that's left of that money. I'll never lose sight of Jago till I get it. I'll get it if I have to kill him for it. Where that schooner goes I go too. I'm going to stow myself away on her. Wherever she goes, she can't get out of the reach of a British consul nowadays, and the first one I can get at shall put a spoke in Jago's wheel. All I want you to do is to let me go aboard his ship with you; if you won't take me, I'll swim to her and refuse to quit. Where she goes, I'm going. I thought all this out the other night, and *I'm going to do it!*'

Harry Bridge turned aside. There were tears in his bright, brave eyes—eyes unused to the 'melting mood.' He had a boy of his own at home.

As for Langdon, he shook Colin's hand so hard that he couldn't help being reminded of Uncle Caleb. Hamilton—though his voice was entirely sympathetic—put a practical question.

'But *we* are going to give information on the first

opportunity. What can you do that the telegraph can't do as well ?'

'A great deal, Dr. Hamilton. The telegraph can't find out as quickly as I can exactly where this robber of stolen money is going; the telegraph can't watch him day and night to see if he hides the money in some artful place aboard or in some of the islands that we've heard he knows so well and trades with; and the telegraph can't kill him in case of need.'

'I am answered,' said Hamilton

Bridge turned round and clapped his strong hand on his young friend's shoulder.

'Colin Casselden,' he cried, 'I won't say a word or do a thing to stop you.'

'Then I'm ready. A stowaway mustn't have much on him, and all I'm going to take I've put in my pockets'

'Hi, there!—yew on that *Iron Dook*: air yew going to let us have that fluid or air yew not? The old man's reduced to drinking his soul's destruction neat. That's so !'

CHAPTER XXXII

STOWAWAYS

AS the boat got away Colin was surprised to notice that Sam Sims had slipped in amongst the crew—a minute before they had said ‘good-bye and good luck’ to each other.

‘Just to see the last of yer,’ was Sam’s explanation, in reply to Colin’s look of astonishment.

The boarding party were received on the flush deck of the clipper by Haslar, who first saw to the stowing of the casks of water and then conducted them below to Jago, with the exception of Colin and Langdon, who remained above.

‘Casselden,’ said the latter, in a low voice, and without looking at him, ‘put your hand in my side pocket and take what you find there. It may be useful. Go on—it isn’t money and it won’t bite you.’

Colin slipped in his fingers. They closed on a revolver, which he deftly conveyed to his own pocket.

The mate swung carelessly round, whispering as he did so—

‘Now try the other side.’

Colin did as he was directed, and drew out an unopened packet of cartridges.

‘Wait where you are—don’t try to hide till I give you the tip.’

Langdon strolled away from him and entered into careless chat with some of the hands engaged in getting new masts and spars ready.

Presently he lounged back again.

‘The fore-hatch is open—I’ll take up attention while you make for it. If nothing whatever comes of this interview—I expect nothing from it myself—I’ll chalk a cross here on the port side of the chart-house.’

‘Thanks, Langdon—and good-bye.’

The ruse was successful, and Colin effected an unseen descent into the fore-hold, whereupon Langdon joined the party in the cabin.

After a quarter of an hour that seemed to him an hour, he heard a trampling of feet that, he rightly conjectured, signified the departure of the visitors, one of whom before he left marked the chart-house with a small cross.

Almost immediately afterwards came to him the sound of the trampling of many more feet and the shouting of orders in Haslar’s strident voice. Then by the motion of the ship he knew that she was gathering

way, and that the breeze was freshening. The hatch had been battened down, his glimmering ray of light being now completely shut off.

Presently he came to the correct conclusion that she carried either very little or a very light cargo. If he had been a sailor, he would have known it the moment he clapped eyes on her.

As the day wore on—the day that to him down there in the darkness was as the longest night he had ever known—he was made conscious that something causing great bustle and commotion was going on above. He indistinctly heard orders issued in a voice he had not heard before.

Though, it seemed to him, there was only the slightest possible suspicion of a foreign accent in it, he judged it to be the voice of Jago. He could no more understand the orders than he could understand the sounds that followed them. Had he—again—been a sailor, he would have known that the new masts were being stepped, a fact which, when accomplished, was brought home to him by the immensely increased velocity of the schooner.

He began to think it was time he revealed himself. He had been afraid to do so hitherto, lest the *Iron Duke* had been steaming a similar course and was still in sight, in which case he would certainly be sent back to her.

He struck a match and looked at his watch. He had thought the afternoon had been far advanced—the sun was less than an hour past his meridian.

There was too much at stake for him to risk anything—he had better wait till night.

By-and-by the *White Wings* began to tack—first a long board, then a short. He could feel her trembling every time just before she swung into the wind, steeped in the darkness of her uncomfortable and stifling lower regions, he began to feel very wobbly in his own lower regions. His sensations recalled the unpleasant experiences of his first days on board the *Iron Duke*.

Every minute seemed an hour, every hour seemed a night. But he held out until a last look at his time-keeper showed him that the evening watch must have been set. Then, bumping and banging himself a good deal in the process, he managed to clamber up into an awkward and constrained position from which he could kick at the hatchway. He did so with all his might, shouting at the same time at the top of his voice.

He hadn't to do either for more than a few moments, for quick feet came scampering towards him, the hatch was flung off, the moonlight streamed in, and a pair of strong hands dragged him roughly up.

Behind the men who hauled him on deck and pulled him on his feet stood the lean, lank figure of Haslar,

who looked at him out of a pair of keen, quizzical eyes. The American's rather cadaverous face was not an altogether prepossessing one from certain points of view, but somehow Colin liked it.

Without knowing exactly why it should do so, Colin felt that the calm countenance conveyed to him the convincing impression that it was that of a man with a hard head and a soft heart. It was the sort of face that seemed to fit in with rough words and kind deeds; there was, so to speak, an analogous kind of contradiction about it.

'Wall?'

There was no indication of surprise in either tone or look, or of any other emotion.

'I'm a stowaway from the *Iron Duke*.'

'How's that?'

Colin was nonplussed, though, of course, he had anticipated the question. How was he to answer it without lying?

'I had my own reasons for preferring to run any risk rather than stay on board the steamer,' he said at length.

'So yew skipped aboard us with your captain this morning, and yew have come to stay.'

'Yes.'

'I guess yew won't get no sorter welcome. There's

a first-class, carriage-paid, say-loon cut about your jib and run, and we're not ex-piring for want of a loafer. Yew air no sailor.'

'No, I'm not. But I'm quite willing to work.'

'Yew don't say so!' drawled Haslar. 'That'll be a weight off our minds. But get your cy-ard ready for our boss, and come below. Yew had better duck your head before he shoots instead of after.'

'I'm ready to face him,' was all Colin said.

As they walked aft, a human howl rose from somewhere under their feet and rang through the whole ship—again and again and again

Even Haslar was startled

'Off with the main-hatches here,' he shouted—'slick! Lanterns, there' Down with yew!'

One more dismal, echoing howl rolled up as the hatches were flung off, and the men lowered themselves into the hold, then all was silent save for the muffled sound of their movements.

'What is it?' called Haslar, peering down

'Another stowaway, sir'

'Snakes' Up with him!'

Climbing, falling, clambering—pushed, shoved, hauled—a dazed face and full-grown body reached the opening. A final scramble, and the struggling man reached the deck, venting the remarkable exclamation—

'Ere's a climack!'

Mr. Samuel Sims, of Hackney Road, London, badge number 03419, stood on the planks of the clipper-schooner *White Wings* in mid-Pacific—the second stowaway.

'Sam!' gasped Colin.

'Yus.'

The commotion had aroused the skipper, who had drunk himself into an early snooze. A running volley of verbal profanity accompanied his quick passage from cabin to deck. Haslar quietly made him acquainted with what had happened, Colin seizing the opportunity of taking stock of Jago before he should be interrogated.

'A Portuguese' Greyling had called him, but it seemed to Colin that something in the prominent cheek-bones, a gleam in the dusky eye, the under-colouring of the swarthy skin, the coarse fibre of the white hair, betokened an admixture of Malayan blood. He shuddered a little as the cruel, treacherous eyes were turned full on him.

Jago asked him little more than Haslar had asked him a few minutes before.

'There's something in this I don't understand—yet,' he said, on receiving similar answers.

He faced suddenly round.

‘Now then, what are *you*?’

‘A Hay Bee,’ was the mendacious assertion of Sam Sims ‘You’ll find me a very useful ’and on board Wages is not so much a object as a ’appy ship’

‘Oh! an able-bodied seaman, are you? We’ll see Just go aft a minute and take the helm’

‘Yus, sir,’ said Sam, readily but uncertainly ‘Where to, sir?’

An uncontrollable fit of laughter seized all who heard poor Sam’s innocent question Even Colin could not help joining in the loud hilarity—loud save in the single case of Pietro Jago, whose mirth was silent. It was always silent It was said of him that he had never been heard to laugh—only seen to smile, and he smiled now. Malicious as he always looked, asleep or awake, in passion or in repose, he never looked quite so malicious as when he smiled

He ceased smiling to scatter the guffawing group of sailor-men around him

‘Stand by for about,’ he roared ‘Hard down your helm there’

‘Ay, ay, sir’

‘Let fly those head-sheets, haul in your main-sheets. Ease your helm. Smart now with the head-sheets there!’

As she swung into the wind her gaff topsail halyards

carried away, and a hand was sent aloft to reeve new ones.

Jago's smile returned with all its malice as he again confronted the unsuspecting cabman.



HAN HAD GOT . . . HALF-WAY UP THE RIGGING.—P. 282

‘You’re an able-bodied seaman, are you? Then up with you and bear a hand with those gaff tops’l halyards.’

He pointed his yellow fingers to the rigging.

‘Up with you!’

Before the words of remonstrance that rose to Colin’s lips could find utterance, Sam had shinned—somehow—half-way up the lower rigging, climbing as never sailor-man climbed since the first ship had masts.

‘Come down, Sam,’ shouted Colin. ‘Have you gone mad? Come down!’

‘Up with you!’

‘Captain Jago, this is murder. You know better than I do that that poor fellow is no sailor. He’ll fall to a certainty. Come down, Sam!’

‘Up with you!’ yelled Jago.

With some elephantine plunges and lunges, Sam gained the lower mast-head, where he was lost to sight by the now flapping sails.

Jago once more fixed his savage eyes on Colin.

‘How did you know my name? Ah!’ he exclaimed, as he saw the lad’s start of dismayed discomfiture, ‘there *is* something more in all this than I understand’—again he added, with all-meaning emphasis—‘*yet!*’

‘Men overboard!’

Like one dark object falling through the air, two men clasped together pitched from the cross-trees into the water. Poor Sam’s unaccustomed foot had tripped. Instinctively he had clutched at the sailor; together they had rolled into space.

‘Haul the stay-s’ls down,’ cried the quick voice of Haslar, ‘haul the main-s’l up, brace up that fore-y’d, haul in your port fore-brace.’

‘Port your helm,’ bellowed Jago: ‘haul in your spanker boom sheet’—and the magnificently handled schooner came to the wind.

Almost at the same instant the boat that Haslar had not lost a moment in ordering to be made ready was lowered from the davits. He said nothing as he saw Colin spring in and grasp an oar, but—

‘Give way, my lads.’

‘Haslar,’ screamed Jago after the speeding boat, ‘bring me back my sailor-man, but let the old lubber drown, and chuck the young one in to drown with him!’

CHAPTER XXXIII

KILLING NO MURDER

THAT Jago had meant what he said was proved by the abuse which he began to hurl at the head of the undisturbed mate when he returned with Sam, the sailor, and Colin all safe.

'Captin,' spluttered the first-named, 'I howns hup. I ain't no sailor bold I'll pay for my passidge · what's yer fare?'

It must have been something more than the American's impenetrability that moved Jago to a sudden and violent change of tactics. From a raging fiend he transformed himself, so far as words and manner went, into an angel of pity, a minister of mercy. He insisted that the rescued 'Hay Bee,' who had so disastrously shattered his professional pretensions, and his fellow-stowaway should share that night a spare cabin near his own.

'We'll go into all explanations now in the morning,' he said. 'Get below and make yourselves comfortable. You'll soon find that my bark's a good deal worse

than my bite. I know I sometimes show my teeth'—he certainly did so as he spoke, for he was smiling one of his suavest smiles—'but I never use them.'

'What a lie!' said Colin to himself. 'There's a dodge in all this that beats me altogether.'

Nevertheless he proceeded willingly enough to the offered cabin, where he soon had the lamp alight, the wringing clothes *off* his dripping companion and a cosy blanket *on* him. As a matter of fact, the hardy Samuel was little the worse for his ducking.

'And now, Sam, what does all this mean?'

'Nothink,' replied Sam. 'As soon as you told me abaht your plan of turnin' into a stowaway I meant to turn into another one. "Two stowaways," says I "is worth more than one stowaway—a older stowaway can keep a heye on a young stowaway." You musn't go forgettin' that in this 'ere swag as you 're a-keepin' *your* heye on, I've got a keb and two 'orses. I turned into a poor little stowaway to look after 'em.'

This was Sam's way of trying to cover up his chivalry and devotion in determining to stick by his young chum at any cost, at any sacrifice, at any risk. But Colin knew—Colin understood.

'What on earth made you try to pass yourself off as a sailor, Sam?' he asked after a significant silence.

'I was dotty,' explained the 'Hay Bee' with engaging

candour. 'What with bein' dahn there along o' the rats in the dark, and what with tumblin' over 'ead and 'eels repeated in gettin' hup, and what with the fright o' that there hold sinner's skeery heyes, I went horf my chump.'

It was not long before the talk of the two turned to the all-engrossing subject of their hopes and plans now that they had succeeded in forcing themselves on board the ship that carried the stolen gold.

At first they spoke with bated breath, but gradually their voices were raised until they reached to almost their ordinary tones.

What did it matter? The door of the cabin was fast closed, the schooner was sunk in silence. Who was there to hear them?

If any one could have heard he must soon have known their secret, for it was of it only that now they talked.

Suddenly changing the position in which he sat, with a cry that was almost a scream, Colin leaped to his feet.

A sliding panel near the bunk-head behind them had been silently slipped back, and in the aperture was the drunken face of Pietro Jago.

How long had it been there? Long enough, for—
'I let the others off with their lives, like the fool I

was. But not now—not now!’ was the words that hissed from its owner. His plot to place the two together so that he might overhear their conversation had succeeded.

For a moment the face disappeared. A yellow hand took its place—an unsteady hand, a hand that shook and trembled—but a hand that held a glistening revolver.

A flash—a report—a crash of glass—the cabin was plunged in darkness.

‘Sam! Sam! Are you hurt?’

‘No, Colin.’

‘A dash for the deck, Sam! or we shall be shot like rats in a hole.’

As Colin flung open the door, two more bullets crashed into the little cabin.

‘Up, Sam!’

Through the smoke-heavy air they rushed. Before the lurking coward outside could fire again, Colin felled him with a single stunning blow.

Panting, they reached the companion-stairs, up which they sped with hot feet, the fall of a slower and heavier tread behind them.

Before they emerged upon the deck—bathed in the flooding glory of the full moon—every chamber of Langdon’s revolver in Colin’s hand was loaded; he filled them as he ran.

Through the excited group that had rushed to the head of the companion-way they burst, Jago stumbling after them. Of the three shots he now fired, two were wasted; the third pierced Colin's right shin.

Sam's otherwise naked body was partially covered by his blanket. He tripped over its flapping ends and fell.

What happened then happened in little more than a moment—it was all over in a little more than a moment.

The direction of Jago's blazing eyes showed that that fallen body was the target for which he intended the bullet he was thrusting into his emptied weapon.

Colin was clinging to the shrouds, almost speechless with pain, and powerless to move. He covered Jago as the latter twisted the loaded chamber of his revolver.

'Drop that pistol,' he gasped, 'or I fire.'

Heeding nothing of the warning, the Portuguese was in the very act of raising his hand when he fell dead on his own deck, shot through the head by Colin Casselden.

His blood streamed from the spot where he dropped almost to the shrinking feet of him who, in killing him, had done no murder.

Some ran to the dead man, others made threateningly for the boy who had righteously slain him.

But Haslar boldly stood before them and barred their way.

'To kill a man in self-defence is a right; to kill a man in defence of a chum is a duty—all the world over. I'm captain of this schooner now—stand back.'



HE FELL DEAD ON HIS OWN DECK

Colin flung his smoking revolver into the sea.

'I did it—and I'd do it again—but I did it!' he sobbed.

Haslar carried the wounded lad in his own arms to

his own berth and laid him there. With his own hands he attended to his hurt.

As Colin lay there the following afternoon—quiet and free from pain—he heard a dull splash in the water; and for a minute he covered his eyes with his hands, for he knew the meaning of the sound.

Shortly afterwards Captain Haslar came to him. Colin told him—all.

‘Two things I may tell yew. As soon as Jago knew the name of your ship—yesterday at dawn—he felt kinder familiar with her, because the cusses he marooned had let out that it was her boss they’d had on toast: and he was oneasy because he knew she’d likely made from the locality of the island.

‘He never told me the true story; but as for that marooning, I was dead set against it, and intended to round on him first chance. As for last night what happened was because he got beastly drunk, or he’d never have started the circus as he did—he’d have got rid of yew quieter. Yew and Sims were confabulating longer than yew thought, and gave him time to top up with quite enough to give him fits.’

‘But, Mr. Haslar—the money—the gold, the notes——?’

‘The whole pile is just safe where he put it—I know where, and I’ve taken possession of all his keys.

He let on to me that he'd got it, and showed it me. Of course he was real fuddled, but he lied to account for carrying such a bank with him right smart. Maybe yew don't know I only joined the schooner at Java ?'

'To whom does she belong?'

'I don't know—now,' replied Haslar suggestively.

'Where is she bound to?'

'We were making for Samoa; but beyond that the old man kept his plans to himself.'

'Mr. Haslar,' cried Colin earnestly, 'will you sail her to San Francisco—help me make the proper declarations before the proper people—and put the money in the proper hands till the law can dispose of it?'

'Yes, I'll do that,' replied the Yankee; 'and for doing it I'll take as much as I can get from anybody who'll give it me'

Colin's response was cut short by a knock at the door.

'Come in, Sam,' he said.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AT THE OLD BAILEY—AND ELSEWHERE

THE trial of Percy Clive Casselden, Gregory Purdyke, George Turberton, and Septimus Farmer at the Old Bailey terminated on its second day.

Separated from her husband only by the railing of the dock sat during its every minute Casselden's faithful, loving, true-hearted wife. Close to her were Colin and her sister; above them all towered the gigantic form of Caleb Holmes, whose long purse had been freely opened for the purposes of Percy Casselden's defence. All the most important witnesses in support of that defence were present in person, though some of them had had to come from afar.

Jarvis of the *Tribul Quin* was there, Captain Pennack of the *Cameroon*, staunch-souled Captain Harry Bridge of the *Iron Duke*, and, of course, the redoubtable Sam Sims.

One early point in the first prisoner's favour assumed an importance that had not been attached to it at the time of its occurrence—the fact that after the actual

perpetration of the crime he had made his visit to the Bank of England. This circumstance, which had been glossed over and even misinterpreted, now, in the light of the full evidence available, was seen in its full significance and consistency.

The judge's summing-up, though it left no point untouched, was comparatively brief, so clear had all the story been made in the course of the trial. The verdict of the jury was delivered without their leaving the box.

Gregory Purdyke, George Turberton, Septimus Farmer—Guilty; *Percy Clive Casselden*—Not Guilty. As he stepped from the dock a cheer that for a moment not even the judge attempted to suppress went up from every corner of the crowded court. Even some scores of the Industrial victims cheered as lustily as anybody.

Casselden clasped his sobbing wife in his arms—she was only sobbing for joy now.

Uncle Caleb could not help it. He shook hands with everybody he could get at, policemen included. Outside the building—when he got there—he stopped utter strangers to shake hands with them on the pavement.

'Oh, what a roarin' old climack!' cried a well-known voice.

'Silence in the Court!'

Instantly the hubbub was stilled — sentence was about to be passed.

Touching Gregory Purdyke, the form was gone through of postponing sentence. All knew why. His inclusion in the charges of the trial that had just terminated had been necessary for the complete elucidation of the tangled mysteries of the now unravelled conspiracy. But all knew that he had yet to stand on trial for his life.

'There goes a dead man,' whispered a voice in the body of the Court-house, as he was removed from the dock to the cells, amid profound silence.

A cheer—less noisy than the burst of applause that had greeted the acquittal of Casselden, and one that was instantly and sternly suppressed—followed the announcement of the doom of Turberton and Farmer: twenty years of penal servitude!

Mr. E. Willington Bruce, Q.C., the leading counsel in the defence of the acquitted director, had for several minutes been engaged in an earnest whispered conversation with Caleb Holmes.

He rose to his feet. The judge's attentive eyes were instantly turned on him.

'My lord,' he said, 'on behalf of Mr. Percy Olive Casselden, I have to crave your lordship's permission to make a statement of some public importance, touch-

ing the affairs of the London Industrial Bank, now in official liquidation. As has been shown in the course of the trial in which your lordship has just pronounced sentence by far the greater portion of the large sum of money—the embezzlement of which was followed by the stoppage of the Bank—is now available for the benefit of the shareholders and creditors. The announcement that I am in a position to make, my lord, is that not only the deficit shown, but any deficit that may be shown, will in the course of a few days be made good, when twenty shillings in the pound, with interest to the day of payment, will be available for the satisfaction of every claim.’

Up rose the prosecuting counsel, a friendly smile on his face.

‘May I ask my learned friend, my lord—solely in the public interest—under whose guarantee the scheme of which he has spoken is to be carried out?’

‘As I am asked the question,’ said Mr. Bruce pointedly, ‘I am at liberty to give my learned friend the information he desires. The absolute payment in full of every just claim against the London Industrial Bank is guaranteed by Mr. Caleb Holmes, of Coopersale, near Hobart, Tasmania.’

Gregory Purdyke’s second trial came hard upon his first.

This time only one sentence could follow the fatal verdict of the jury, and vindicate the majesty of the law, whose scarlet-robed minister drew from beneath his hands the terrible black cap, and adjusted it on his head.

Pity?—yes, pity, but no indication of the faintest hope of mercy was in the tones of the low, measured voice that addressed the convicted man.

Only a few sentences, addressed as to a dying man, preceded the utterance of the awful words that cut him off from all earthly hope for ever.

'It only remains for me to pass upon you the sentence of the law, which is'

Gregory Purdyke's head fell forward on to the shivering hands that grasped the rail of the dock in which he stood.

' . . . that you be taken hence to the place from whence you came, and there be hanged by the neck until you be dead. And may Almighty God have mercy on your soul!'

The warders touched the shoulder of the condemned murderer.

But he did not move—he did not stir.

The judge looked up.

'Remove him.'

Again the warders touched him—still he remained motionless.

‘Take him from the dock: let the man be removed at once.’

One of the warders lifted the fallen head—and looked.

‘He’s gone, my lord,’ he said.

At the moment of the passing of his sentence, the heart of Gregory Purdyke had ceased to beat.

In Hobart lives a man who owns about one moiety—as the lawyers say—of all the vehicles that ply for hire, and of the horses that draw them. His wife is named Maria, and in addition to three little Cockneys, whom they imported with the rest of their belongings, they are in proud possession of a crowing, kicking, clawing, little native-born Tasmanian, whose Christian name—though he doesn’t know it—is Colin.

The name of that man is Samuel Sims—frequently addressed as ‘Esquire.’

At Coopersale, near Hobart, more prosperous than ever (for gold has been discovered on the estate), and, if possible, healthier and happier than ever, live Caleb Holmes, his wife, their family.

Uncle Caleb is as big as ever, and shakes hands as much as ever.

Mr. Richard Bundick—strong and well—will not (like Othello) find ‘his occupation gone,’ when the youngest of his pupils at Coopersale grows out of his hands; for

there is no secret about the fact that when that time comes he will only cease to be resident tutor in order that he may become Mr. Holmes' secretary.

His visits to Hobart are frequent—very frequent indeed: so frequent that not altogether groundless suspicions are entertained that they are not influenced solely by his desire to see much of his uncle, aunt, nephews and nieces.

There is supposed to be another attraction. The attraction has been seen several times. She is very *nice*.

One of the most magnificent steamers that ever ploughed the main was launched last year. The name of her captain is Harry Bridge, that of her first officer Fred Langdon.

In Moorgate Street, London, E.C., is a flourishing institution which we will call the New Industrial Bank, Limited.

Offers of assistance came freely from financial quarters; the new shares were eagerly taken up; deposits poured in; the reconstructed Bank, founded on a rock, is raising its storeys high.

In a very beautiful home on High Beech, Epping Forest—a home that is as happy as it is beautiful—live the managing director—you know his name—and his sweet-faced wife: in the old home.

Though he never visits there professionally—for in that capacity he is not required—a doctor who has taken a thriving country practice a few miles away sometimes ‘drops in’ in friendly mood. He never comes without a welcome or departs without an invitation to come again. His name is George Clarendon Hamilton.

On board one of Her Britannic Majesty’s finest iron-clads is a middy waiting for his first epaulette. His name is Colin Casselden.

THE END